

Australian Studies in Journalism

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The changing role of a newspaper editor

Jack Waterford

Newspapers face new challenges because of the ready access readers have to alternative sources of information, including the burgeoning Internet, as well as the problem of journalists connecting effectively with their readers. Editors are expected to have more understanding and responsibility for marketing and revenue, and to produce quality newspapers while the proportion of their editorial staff deployed to revenue-raising work is increasing. The new environment creates fresh opportunities, with rewards for imagination and energy — but core professional values in journalism must be maintained.

One of the things which editors and journalists are currently muttering about under their breaths is the feeling that there has never been a time in which journalists, particularly newspaper journalists, have been less influential within the corridors of government. A John Howard, one might remark, is not much affected by what he reads in newspapers, though he is said to pay rather more attention to how the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* plays things than the way, say, it is played by the *Sydney Morning Herald* or the *Age*. When he speaks to journalists at all, it is usually in controlled doorstep interviews, in which he rattles off some pre-prepared line for the broadcast media and does not submit himself to questions. And he goes on to talkback radio, where he can speak directly to his audience without having his words twisted by or interpreted by a journalist. At best, most of the time, the print journalists who are reporting him are confined to picking up and quoting from the transcripts issued by his office, and, perhaps, weighing the spin placed upon it by his retinue against the spin placed upon it by his enemies. The transcripts, those who are mordant about the fate of newspapers might note, are available on the Internet.

It is not merely the lack of access, or his, and his colleagues' unwillingness to submit themselves to close scrutiny which is the problem. Whether because of that or otherwise, the problem is that very little of the agenda of the politicians appears to be being set by newspapers. The politicians might well be running on some of the issues which are on the newspapers' front pages, but, all too often, the newspaper is doing not much more than reporting what has been said by others. All too often, however, the newspaper has played little role, other than as a transmitter, of disclosing fresh facts to which the politicians have been forced to respond.

All too often, one might add, while one is continuing down this mordant line, there has been little news which has first been brought to the attention of readers by the newspaper anyway. It is not merely the fact, which has been going on for more than a generation, that radio and television, (and now the Internet) can and do bring spot news to the attention to most potential readers 12 or more hours before a newspaper hits the street. It is not merely a function of the fact that, within the past few decades, the broadcast media have ceased to draw up their news budgets from the front pages of the morning newspapers, but instead edit their material in such a way that it is, as often as not, the writers who are following them.

But it is also a reflection that the more serious broadcast media, particularly the ABC, are running extensive analysis and commentary as well as spot news, and where the influence and expertise of, say, a Laurie Oakes, a Kerry O'Brien or a Fran Kelly can stand up against anything that print has to offer.

Now add to this the fact that newspaper circulations are in long-term decline, and are now running at levels possibly a half of where they stood a generation ago. Add in, moreover, the evidence of increased use of the Internet. This is going up not only in absolute terms, but particularly among that class of people who are very information hungry, whose loyalty, one might think, is most critical for the survival of the newspaper.

We used to say, after all, that among the advantages of the newspaper over other media was the fact that it conveyed information in a permanent form, that it typically could provide more space, and thus more information and more detail, than any alternative, and that the production cycle also allowed that time for reflection whereby one could get context, analysis and understanding. It is by no means clear that any of these advantages still exist, or that, where they do, that they will continue.

There are, of course, some things that can be put against such gloom. One might note, for example, that newspaper profits have never been higher. Nor have their shares prices. Virtually every Australian newspaper of any substance has invested tens, sometimes hundreds, of millions of dollars in new printing presses over the past decade, investments which are calculated on being around for a long time. It is true that the circulation of newspapers has fallen, but the size of the average newspaper has not: the consumption of newsprint by metropolitan Australian newspapers has doubled in a generation and is still increasing. That newsprint, of course, is increasingly going into new sections — thick with advertisements — focused on lifestyle, and motoring, and food, and wine and travel and computers and so on, which claim to be successful in attracting or holding on to readers.

Anyone who publishes a newspaper, of course, accumulates an incredible amount of data. Increasingly that data is being recycled for profit in a range of ways — on Internet sites, in syndication among other newspapers within a group, in focused material directed at particular audiences, and, around the world, if not so much in Australia, which has its cross-media rules, in television, radio and pay broadcast media. The use of some of these media to transmit printed material may seem, at first sight, a risky thing, because its availability elsewhere might seem to threaten resort to the base medium, the newspaper itself. Yet, if there are risks, they are ones which owners have put themselves in good positions to control. It is no accident that media companies, and ones based on print at that, dominate the content of most news web sites, in Australia or around the world.

Even the supposed threat to newspaper revenue from electronic classified advertising can be exaggerated, especially in situations where one player dominates a local market. It is quite true that the computer can do a better job of classifying an advertisement than a newspaper. If it's all on a computer, and you are, say, wanting to buy a house, you can search for that house by locality, or number of bedrooms, or by access to facilities, or price range or a host of other things. In due course, probably now in some places, you will be able, once you fix upon a particular house, to do a virtual walk through it, or inspect its plans, or visualise it once the hallway is painted green.

The problem is in getting people to visit such a site. What it will attract, assuming that there is no problem about the marketplace being hooked up to computers, is the class of people who are conscious that they want to buy a house at that moment. But the newspaper, as a mass product, can bring in a much wider marketplace, one just as important to those involved in buying and selling, or, just as importantly, in playing middleman. Our real estate columns are read by people who are not aware that they are in the housing market, but who read them to windowshop, or to make some guess about the value of their own property, or to see what X is expecting for theirs. In just the same way, our for sale columns are read by people who did not realise that they were in the market for a cot, or a bookcase, until the availability of a cheap one was drawn to their attention. As a marketplace, that is, the newspaper is like walking through a busy marketplace in the street. The Internet, all too often, is a shop in a back alley, that you know about only after you consult the pink pages.

There's more than a lot of that of course, about news itself. I can — I do — program a computer to search various Internet sites to find material which is of interest to me, and it would be quite possible now to design for every news-hungry person in Australia their own site in which news is ranked in order of importance according to their pre-order. I used to be able to say, ah yes, but no pre-order can make sure that an unexpected event, such as an earthquake in Turkey or the self-defrocking of a bishop will come up — but it is possible to organise the mix to make sure that there is placed in the diet a host of breaking stories as well as the special orders.

What will not change, however, is the capacity of the news organisation to generate such material. And, particularly at the local level, material that rival news services will find it very difficult to match. Even if I stationed 10 reporters in Turkey, I could probably not match the material, available to me anyway, coming from a host of news and other services. But there are not that many rival reporters on the ground covering community affairs in Canberra, and those who want Canberra material in their diet will generally need to come to me.

And just as significantly the newspaper will still seem to be the best menu for the smorgasbord. It is quite possible to see the newspaper as a part of the layering which HTML can offer — so that, in a short time, the ordinary newspaper will routinely publish with almost all reports, little notes saying things such as “For the full text of the minister’s speech, and details of the scheme in operation, see our web site”. A challenging time will come, indeed, when the reader will be invited, if she wants, to look, in effect, at the reporter’s notes — all of the material, the press releases and the documents, and the notes and transcripts of interviews, which she used to prepare the report. Some students of media may deconstruct these to point to systematic problems about the way that reporter went about her work; but even ordinary critical readers may get access to materials from which they can draw conclusions contrary to those presented, or nuances which the reporter, for reasons of time or space, did not think fit to offer.

The sheer volume of such raw and processed material underlines the fact for more and more journalists, the central role will not be in writing stories as such, but in selecting and editing material to be published, in whatever form. At the *Canberra Times*, for example, more than half of the professional journalists are working on the production side of the paper. They are making editing decisions — deciding what stories to use and where. They are making presentational decisions — how to display it, and, increasingly, with what extra devices such as graphics, tables, dot point summaries and so on. They are working up copy which has been chosen so that it fits space allocated, meets standards of accuracy and so on.

My first job in journalism was as a copyboy, and one of the jobs I had was to clear the telex machines, picking up takes of stories and putting them, according to subject, on the sport, or the finance, or the world, or the general news desks. On a typical day, there would be about 200,000 words or so of such materials coming from about eight machines. On top of that, of course, would be the press releases which came in by mail or which were picked up by roundspeople, and documents such as reports in parliament, court judgments, shire council agendas and minutes and so on — a confection from which we put out perhaps 40,000 editorial words a day — about a short novel.

Last week, we published 639,102 editorial words — averaging about 91,000 a day — in 1181 separate reports — about 170 reports a day if you count columns of briefs as though they were single stories. That's more than twice the output, but the rush of material in — and these days not only from the old sources but also by the computer, the fax and email is such that we are probably using only about half a per cent of the material which is readily available to us. It is the job of sifting through that material — say 20 million words a day — for that which is interesting, which is the most time and resource-consuming part of our work.

That task, of course, is engaged in at all levels of journalism — indeed it is the reporter who plays the major role in getting much of the material down to manageable shape. They may not do much combing of our world news, or many other sections, but it is they who will be combing through the press statements, the court judgements, the annual reports and so on to determine whether there is any material of interest. And in many cases, of course, it is they, whether by inquiries from real persons, or by Internet trawlings, or use of the library or whatever, who will bring into the selection process not only the material which has come in of its own accord, but that which casts some light upon it. It is not unknown, indeed, for their inquiries to reveal some story which did not come in of its own accord.

Now one may ask why, if there is so much extra material available and being published, so much more interesting a smorgasbord on offer, why fewer people are lined up to partake.

One of the obvious answers is that there is now a much greater competition in the marketplace for news and ideas. Some people are getting what they want elsewhere — though it is my experience that those who are hungry for news will devour it in any medium: I do not fear that news junkies will desert newspapers for the Internet. But not everyone is a news junkie. There are many in the marketplace who have little appetite for news and who have discovered they can do without it. Our market research shows that, in many cases, one could not give our product away to them.

They don't need news in the old way — or, if they do, they can get it from an array of sources and will go to newspapers only when it is necessary. I would like to believe that our phenomenal Saturday circulation is a function of my excellent column in our special Saturday magazine, but it may owe more to the car ads.

Even among those who are not positively hostile to newspapers, there are many who find that one can survive without them, at least for a while. The population has never been better informed, so that, when there are fresh events, it is easier to fake it from listening to radio or television broadcasts, or even by chatter at the office.

Moreover, the avalanche of information, even after it has been pre-sorted in the way I have described, is such that many people perceive that less and less of it is actually vitally important for them to know. Those extra 50,000 words do not often contain critical information, but they can make the paper more daunting.

The feeling that close readership of the news is not essential is reinforced if news judgments are awry. During the 1980s, Paul Keating boasted that the economic literacy of the population was increasing in leaps and bounds, and every parrot in every pet shop was talking about micro-economic reform. That might be so, but even when we all knew the balance of payments or the current account deficit was very, very important, most of us were bored witless by them and read, at most, only the headline and the first few sentences of any such reports. I suspect that this was so even for readers of the *Financial Review*.

Many of those who think that such material is riveting have been shaping other news judgments, and dismissing whole areas of interesting human activity as unimportant.

Similarly, we have often been guilty of boring our readers with many of our reports about politics and about policy. These should be interesting and important topics, and are when they are written with imagination and an eye and ear for the reader's attention. We must remember, of course, that we live in an age when there is increasing popular cynicism about politics and public institutions. Now this could increase interest in politics, but, too often, our readers have turned off not only our politicians but what is written about them as well. The tendentiousness of some of our copy, or its focus on some areas, however worthy, of little interest to readers has not helped either.

There are some alarming portents on the horizon in this regard, quite apart from some truth in the comment I reported earlier about journalists never being less influential in national political debates. Take three recent elections. At the 1999 Victorian election, Jeff Kennett was able to make the media a major part of the issue, and then to use that fact to avoid answering questions. They were out of touch, he said. They did not really know what was going on, or what was concerning people or what was of interest to them. As it turned out, neither did he, but there was nothing about the coverage of the campaign which demonstrated that experienced political journalists were in fact in touch. No one, including I must confess myself, seemed to have any inkling of the result — a fact which has not stopped us all explaining, at great length, from the next day on, just exactly what Jeff Kennett did wrong. One might, of course, say much the same of much of our journalistic expertise on Indonesia and Timor.

At the past two federal elections, there has been almost no role for journalists to ask questions. Major party campaigns are so tightly organised that political leaders never have an unchoreographed moment: their minders dread the idea that all might go awry if, by accident, a journalist asked a question which stumped the boss. It's too risky. Indeed the major stories from their highly-scripted affairs is, often, some slight deviation from the script. Yet again, indeed, much

of the text of statements actually made come from picking up transcripts of talkback programs and doorstops. I can no longer see any reason for going on the zoo trail, except as a sort of deathwatch.

In such campaigns, one of the reasons that the conservative parties, in particular, will use for bypassing the press is that they see it as out of touch, and biased. The evidence used for this is not only the sort of material on actual bias or predisposition that John Henningham has published.

It comes also from the fact that the party's own polling often shows that press gallery preoccupations are of little interest out in the electorate, but that other issues, of which many of the journalists seem almost entirely unaware, are running strongly but being ignored. The contempt, in short, is professional — we are not doing our jobs.

The charge, moreover, that journalists identify with — indeed see themselves as a key part of — an intellectual opinion-forming elite, but are out of touch with what ordinary Australians think, resonates well in the electorate. It is not hard to find journalists more arrogant and dogmatic than Paul Keating, and it is not difficult to make some Australians focus their resentment on them.

As Pauline Hanson did. There were times when the Hanson campaign, badly derailed, set up confrontations between journalists and Hanson supporters as their only way of guaranteeing headlines.

Now by no means is all of the criticism deserved. But there is not only a germ of truth in much of it, and so little evidence of self-correcting mechanisms, that we can hardly be surprised about some cynicism by our readers.

In this context, of course, it is as well to remember that fashionable grab-bags of ideas about “the media” are not always very discriminating about which media, or which people, are being stereotyped. When it is time for generalisation about, say, privacy, it is by the conduct of the *London Sun* that we are judged; when it comes to public interest and common sense, by a Mike Willesee and the Kangai siege, and when it comes to ethics, it is by John Laws.

Now we all might spend some time asserting that we should not be judged by the lowest common denominator, but the truth is that we have often not demonstrated that the professional standards of our trade are any better than the example on which the public might pick. Even some of the quality newspapers are open to serious attack on issues of accuracy, privacy, respect for dignity and ethical standards. They are open to attack for their practices, what they actually do. But they are also open to attack for what they do not do — which is the setting and enforcement of standards, and being seen to do so.

A number of newspapers now have published codes of professional practice, but some still have not. The Laws affair has forced a number of media organisations to examine their own practices — with results which have often horrified editors — and to seek some consensus on ethical practices.

The problem we have in this area is often made worse by the fact that the professional standards which most of us would take as read in fields such as politics or finance are often not being applied in other, growth, sections of our newspapers. On some Australian newspapers, the perks available to journalists writing about, say, travel, computers, cars, fashion or entertainment are such that I am surprised the jobs are paid at all; they should be let out on tender.

There are now professional problems about new and highly unofficial types of advertorial — not copy written as a condition of the placement of advertisements, but copy written in fulfilment of unspoken agreements about the mutual exchange of compliments. In many cases, of course, not only are these entirely private and improper deals made by journalists, but editors have been slow to detect them — not least because they have never paid much attention to the stuff at the back of the paper, so long as there are no complaints from the management team — which is to say the advertising department.

This stuff at the back of the paper is a problem of another sort. On not a few newspapers, a quick glance at a budget will give the impression that the staff and resources are growing, and have been consistently over a period. The truth is, however, that a higher and higher proportion of that staff are working in detached areas preparing

material for magazines and sections which are revenue-focused. Sometimes it seems as if there is a new one every week, and so stale are most of the ideas that most need to be reinvented and relaunched with a year in any event. Their content, again, may not be advertorial as such, but if it doesn't match the market research, the journalist will know about it soon enough.

Staffing these sections, and making these sections seem light and bright and attractive to advertisers is consuming more and more time and resources on newspapers — even if, as I say, too little of the time is being devoted to supervising content and establishing and upholding professional standards. At the same time, of course, such sections are becoming more and more important to the newspaper's revenue base.

There's a risk here which is not being managed well. The subject matter of many of these sections is already well covered in the ordinary magazine market. But the sections inside a newspaper have a head start over the magazines, not only for having the appearance of being a free bonus, but by being able to leapfrog off the circulation of a mass newspaper. In the trade, of course, there is great controversy about the capacity of some of these magazines to claim audited circulation.

In any event, no one seriously pretends that a magazine called *Drive*, or *Metro*, or *Domain* or *Icon*, to pick just a sample of one newspaper's offerings, would be snapped up separately from the newspaper. Even picked up if they were free. Rather, we like to think, they add value to a paper, but are bought with the package because the package contains news — that is, fresh information about important events. It is on the success of the newspaper that these magazines and sections depend.

The point I am making is that if we either starve the news section of resources, or, if we take our attention off the news in a way that it misses the market, then both sides of the product will ultimately fail. On too many newspapers, alas, the feeling of the managements seems to be that the back of the paper is too much subsidising the front, and that the consequence should be that the front takes another shave.

There is another risk too, of course. If, in the search for circulation, we make the front of the paper, the news section, look more and more like a magazine, some readers will treat it as such, rather than as a newspaper. That is to say that they will buy it when they want something to read, but not especially so as to find out what is going on. In such a marketplace, of course, it can be difficult for a newspaper to compete against *Who* magazine.

Another of the modern pressures on editors is to engage in one form or another of booster journalism. In many cases, straight conflict of interest is involved, because the newspaper corporation itself has an interest in the idea or the thing being boosted. The obvious current example is the Olympic Games, but, in this town, rugby league would do as well. In the more obvious cases, the journalistic conundrum is not merely the conflict of interest, obvious as that is, so much as the fact that the event or thing in question actually happens to be of legitimate news interest. One can — sometimes one must — write about it, but how will a skeptical public even believe that the newspaper is disinterested?

In other communities, the conflict is not necessarily one of the financial conflicts of interest of owners. They can be the pressure to suspend journalistic judgment because a project is worthy, or community focused, or might generate jobs or whatever. One sees it from the way the media allow themselves to be used by health and welfare groups who unilaterally announce that this week is Diabetes Week or this day is Scrofula Day, or whatever, and expect uncritical coverage of material which, however informative, does not contain news. But it is more insidious, I suspect, when there is an economic tinge.

There are areas in Australia which have been doing it tough and which are looking for projects which stimulate employment and growth. There are politicians and businessmen who gather together to devise such projects, which are, of course, worthy of legitimate news interest which might be expected to be reasonably sympathetic. It is perfectly reasonable to expect a journalist or a newspaper to be a champion of its own community.

But that community is generally best championed by the media's maintaining some distance and detachment too. If the cause is good, it will invite its own support. If, on the other hand, the newspaper's enthusiasm for a cause, however worthy, makes it a mere puff sheet, it is not only its credibility in this field which suffers. Yet all often, managements, and, sometimes, either editors, are jumping on board such projects in ways that are clearly compromising their primary asset — believability.

And, sometimes, of course, you can be damned if you do, and damned if you don't. In my city, for example, we have a chief minister who, like the departed Jeff Kennett and your own dear premier has a soft spot for sporting coups, whereby, at vast public expense, games, races, tournaments and what have you are lured to our city. The doing so, of course, brings in tourists by the million. These spend millions of dollars in money, which circulates around the city creating jobs and, so, is a good thing. Heaven help you, in any event, if you suggest otherwise. One will be accused of being anti-Canberra, and anti-jobs.

One of the legends of the newspaper on which I work is of John Douglas Pringle, who became managing editor of the *Canberra Times* in 1963 at the time the newspaper passed from the hands of the Shakespeare family into the Fairfax Empire.

John Pringle was a great journalist. Before he came to the *Canberra Times* he had been deputy editor of the *Guardian* and of the *Observer* and editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald*. He was, before he retired, to edit the *Sydney Morning Herald* again, spending as many years as I have been in journalism as editor or deputy editor of a substantial newspaper. He was, of course, a brilliant writer of great ideas. Yet, whether as a manager or as an editor, he sometimes seemed to have only the haziest ideas about what was involved in the physical production of a newspaper.

He knew, for example, nothing at all about typography. On one occasion he wandered out to the linotypesetting department of the *Canberra Times* with his leader and said to one of the setters: "Now, I think I have made a very important point here. Could that be put in that — you know — that slanty type."

I'm a bit italic myself, and used to tell that tale to excuse some of my own ignorance about some of the finer points of the newspaper production process. I became an editorial executive at a time when it had become unusual for a person to reach such a position without extensive experience on the sub-editors' table, and I had none, though it was a deficiency I was soon forced to remedy. But it was not the only deficiency.

The modern editor needs to know about a lot of things which I like to think did not distract John Pringle too much from the essentials of journalism. One now has to know about spreadsheets, and rosters and annual leave and industrial awards, about computer systems and raster image processors, and mysterious devices which integrate pictures and text on a page. One has to know something of marketing and circulation, about the affairs of the advertising department and the accounts departments, and, though there is nothing particularly new about editors having to keep within budgets, or be held to account for a newspaper's circulation or, at least to some extent its revenue, the tools and techniques for doing so are of a sophistication beyond all imagining a few decades ago. There are many many more meetings, and many many more internal pieces of paper to sign.

Moreover, that editor no longer lives in an environment in which he exercises power in an autonomous way, but is increasingly a part of a management team.

As a recent series of articles in the *American Journalism Review* put it, there was once a time when "editors ruled their world like princes. No more. In today's corporate environment, their roles have multiplied even as their clout has waned".

Actually, I am not entirely sure that a John Pringle would necessarily agree that his life as an editor was idyllic, scarcely ever troubled by mundane considerations such as budgets or rosters, or worries about the advertising revenue. He might also point out that I, and most other editors like me, enjoy a freedom of action in our journalistic functions which was unimaginable, even in enlightened newspapers, in his day, and with staff and resources and access to information out of all proportion to what he had then.

He might be telling me gently that it was not so much that all these things did not trouble him than that they were mere incidents of something which mattered more. There are not that many editors who are remembered for their skill in keeping to a budget, or who, in their declining years, would think that the trouble of doing so was worth writing about in their memoirs. There are plenty remembered for setting standards and creating and nurturing public debate.

I must say that I am an optimist in this field, not only about the future of newspapers, but about the future of journalism. I do not think that there was ever a time when imagination and energy had better prospects. The very challenge of the new situation creates a lot of opportunities. And even some of the dreaded tools of modern managerialism are capable of helping.

I do not think, however, that we are going either to scale new heights or find new readers if we abandon core professionalism and standards. It is about these that editors must nag themselves, their owners, their staffs, and sometimes those who share with us in the responsibility for nurturing and establishing these standards.

Mr Waterford is editor of *The Canberra Times* and an adjunct professor of the University of Queensland. This article is a transcript of a seminar given at the University of Queensland Journalism Department, Brisbane, in October 1999.

How newsroom failures limit readership gains

Kerry Green

The organisational structure and culture of newsrooms in Australia's newspapers militate against the effective application of readership research recommendations. A lack of communication between and within departments, fear of the loss of editorial independence, and the absence of adequate review functions in leadership roles condemns newspapers to continuing failure to implement recommended content changes.

Australian newspapers are confronted by the same visceral problem that confronts newspapers around the world — declining circulations. As circulations fail to keep pace with population growth, newspapers everywhere are forced to ask themselves: What are we doing wrong? The answers to that question are manifold and far from unanimous. Reasons proposed for falling circulation range from competition from other media (most recently the internet), to declining levels of literacy among the population in general, to the proposition that newspapers represent a “mature” industry approaching its sunset.

In an attempt to halt the circulation decline, the industry and institutions within it engage in readership research, in the hope of making the content of newspapers more relevant and more palatable to potential readers. This paper aims to show that the effectiveness of such readership research is damaged, or at least limited, by the kind of organisational structure which exists in Australian newsrooms, making the effective implementation of readership research unlikely.

The effectiveness of audience research in lifting reader interest at any Australian newspaper will depend on a range of factors, but most obviously three: the appropriateness of the research undertaken, the efficiency and skills of the researchers, and the degree to which the

research is implemented. Interviews with researchers at News Ltd and Fairfax in Sydney and Melbourne, where the bulk of audience research occurs, have revealed a wide range of research topics and methods applied with apparent efficiency by skilled researchers over the past decade. The sheer range of the audience research undertaken — News Ltd conducts hundreds of projects each year — ensures that some of it, at least, is high-quality research; the first two factors required for effectiveness, therefore, exist at the major metropolitan daily newspapers in Australia. The third factor, however — effective implementation — is not guaranteed.

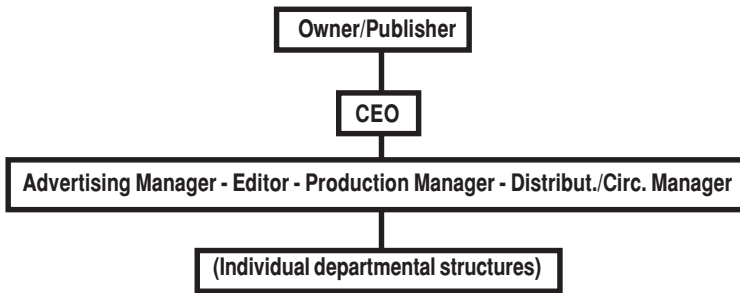
For audience research to be effectively implemented at a newspaper, the research must be:

1. Clearly understood by newsroom staff;
2. Accepted by newsroom staff as valid and meaningful;
3. Supported by management controls.

Interviews with newsroom executives and researchers, and a national survey of copytasters in Australian newspapers, indicate these three conditions rarely co-exist in Australian newspaper newsrooms.

To understand why the three conditions rarely co-exist in an Australian newspaper newsroom, it is necessary to examine the organisational structures of news media organisations in general and of newsrooms in particular, and to examine management practices in newsrooms.

Most Australian newspaper organisations reflect a top-down management approach typical of large organisations. They provide a generally clear line of command, with line managers reporting upwards to their immediate superiors, and they are generally highly departmentised, as described by Lacy et al (1993, p.34-36). Ultimate authority generally lies with the owner and is delegated through a publisher to a chief executive officer, and then on to individual line managers. Although there is no such thing as a “typical” Australian newspaper organisation, the four major publishers — News Ltd, Fairfax, Australian Provincial Newspapers, and Rural Press — share many of the characteristics of a “generic” model which could be characterised by the following schema:

**Figure 1**

In a “normal” management structure, an organisation like that above would have executives in each level of management reporting to the executive in the level above. In the Editorial Department, then, editorial executives would report to the editor or editor-in-chief, if one existed. But to whom does the editor report?

The structure would indicate that the editor reports to the chief executive officer, as do the other line managers. In many day-to-day bureaucratic issues, such a line of reporting is efficient and sensible. But when the issue of editorial independence is raised, difficulties occur. Editorial independence is enshrined in the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance journalists’ code of ethics which holds that reporting of the news must be free from any influence that might “taint” its perceived objectivity. Although it is not contained in the code of ethics, by convention a newspaper’s editor is deemed to have total control over the content of the paper, ensuring a church/state type of division between the editorial functions of the paper and the commercial functions of the paper. Such a division is necessary because the “public responsibility” role of a news media organisation can sometimes conflict with its commercial aims (Lacy et al, p.43; Underwood 1993, p.143, p.166). But if the editor is the final arbiter on editorial content, that implies seniority over other line managers such as the advertising manager and production manager — and a blurring of the chain of command between the editor and those above. This blurring of the chain of command is more evident in some organisations than others and was most evident in the attempted takeover of Fairfax by Packer in 1991, when staff drew up a charter of editorial independence vesting

editorial control in the editor, and not the owner (More & Smith 1992, p.130).

The concept of editorial independence, therefore, is at odds with an organisational structure which places two or more layers of senior management above the editor and assumes a homogeneity of management issues. The fact that the conflict exists does not necessarily mean that the structure is unworkable — editors in interviews (1996, personal communications) have reported they feel free to go straight to the publisher with concerns, or alternatively that they have the option of resigning if they strongly disagree with management decisions. And Giles puts forward the following schema (p.114) as a typical organisational structure for a US newspaper, where the executive editor appears to have a much closer relationship to the publisher:

While the Australian structure might not be unworkable, it also is not optimal — and where less than optimal conditions exist, implementation of management decisions may be flawed. This is especially true when the decisions concern the character of editorial content and who has control over it.

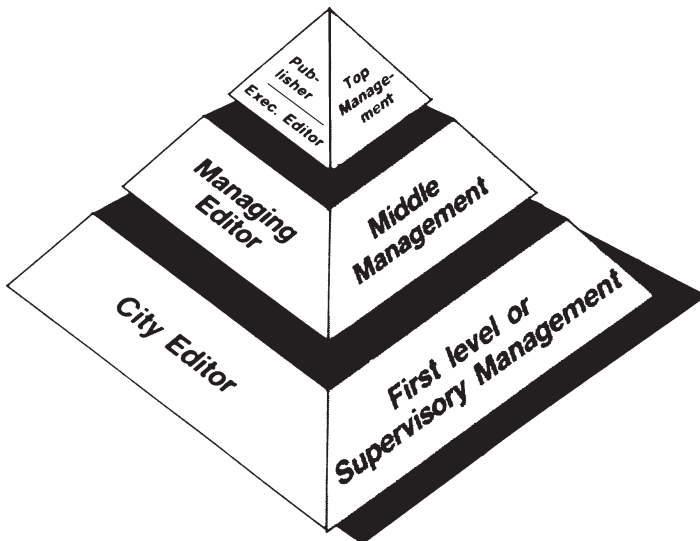


Figure 2

If the organisational structure of Australian newspapers provides the capacity for conflict upwards over editorial content between the editor and the editor's superiors, it also provides the capacity for conflict downwards between the editor and the editor's staff.

A typical newspaper editorial department could be characterised by the following schema:

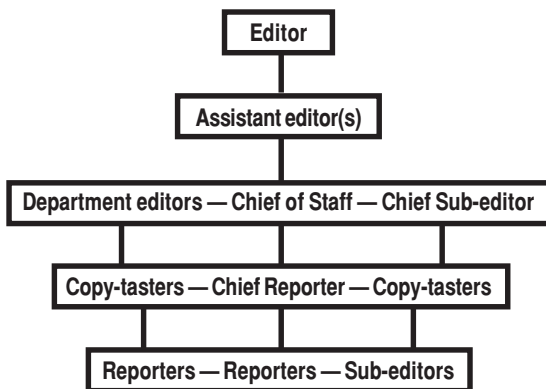


Figure 3

Definition: In this paper, the term copytaster is used to describe any senior journalist who has some influence on the stories that get into print or that are discarded. It is meant to include journalists from the “rank” of chief reporter/senior reporter up through department heads for departments like Features, Finance and Sport, to chiefs of staff and chief sub-editors, to associate editors and assistant editors, up to editors in chief. The key to inclusion in the term lies in an individual having some control over the publishability of a report. It is not meant to include reporters who may decide to report or not report on an issue, or sub-editors who have control over the size or positioning of a story once it has been assigned to a page.

If an editor wants to respond to audience research findings by implementing change in the paper's content mix, that change will largely be implemented at the level of the copy-taster — the journalist responsible for deciding that a story is at least worthy of being brought to the attention of the daily news conference, or of filling a space left open on a page. But as Figure 3 shows, there can be three and even

more organisational layers between the editor and the copy-tasters. In small newspapers, where the copy-tasting function might be performed solely by department heads, or the chief of staff/chief sub-editor, the number of layers can be reduced, but even that will not improve the chances of research recommendations being implemented unless other conditions are present. One of those conditions is communication in the newsroom. Communication, according to Giles “is the vital link that influences both individual motivation and group behaviour in the newsroom” (p.79). To motivate staff to accept change and to achieve change, therefore, an editor must communicate effectively with subordinates.

Two areas of communication are critical to mass media organisations. The first and most obvious is the mass communication between the organisation and its audience; the second is organisational communication between departments and between superiors/subordinates within the media organisations.

The general mass communication model is well known (Lasswell 1950, Gerbner 1969), but warrants a brief description here. In the model, a newspaper (for example) communicates messages (stories/reports) through a channel (the physical product of the newspaper) to a mass audience (its readers) to some effect. The effect can be distorted by “noise”, or interference in the transmission of the messages. The model presents a closed loop by assuming the transmission is a two-way communication which includes feedback from the audience to the newspaper. If the messages are consonant with the audience’s (uses and gratifications) needs, the audience will find them interesting and relevant (and continue to buy and read the newspaper).

In practice, in Australia (and elsewhere for that matter), the feedback element is largely missing from the model and specific organisational elements of noise exist to damage the working of the model.

Discussion of the role that feedback plays in affecting the content of a newspaper (its “messages”) requires some description of the work of journalists at newspapers. As the studies by Altheide (1976), Schlesinger (1978) and others show, all journalists are to some extent “gatekeepers” in the flow of information from source to receivers.

What is known as “copy-flow” starts with an organisation choosing to “cover” a particular issue — that is, choosing to allow information about that issue through an initial gate and to begin to flow towards its readers. At a number of points along the production process, a variety of journalists must make decisions about continuing or discontinuing the copy flow for each story. Perhaps the most influential of all those “gatekeepers” are journalists whose role specifically includes “copytasting”. Typically copytasters are senior editorial employees — editors and sub-editors — who make decisions about which stories will get into the paper and what prominence will be assigned to them. Copytasters are a small subset of the editorial team in any newsroom but they clearly wield an enormous amount of influence in “constructing reality” for a paper’s audience and, just as clearly, a paper relies on their judgment to an enormous extent in addressing its audience.

Continually declining newspaper circulations represent a strong message that the copytasters’ judgment is faulty. The judgment of the editor, who carries the responsibility for copy tasting and who has the power to change the copy taster, also could be faulty. Major newspaper groups, at least, have attempted to address the problem with market research to try to define the needs and wants of their audiences.

While the archetypal communication model assumes a two-way communication between sender and receiver, the capacity for a copytaster to receive and act upon feedback is limited. Feedback in Australian newspapers tends to be anecdotal, rather than empirical. In many organisations, it consists largely of reported fluctuations in circulation figures, filtered phone calls from readers, and letters to the editor. Interviews with market research officers of major Australian newspapers show that it rarely consists of carefully constructed market research which links the anecdotal evidence to audience needs and wants and/or audience psychological, sociological and demographic characteristics (Bunn 1998, Lithgow 1998, Dalrymple 1994, Balogh 1994, Trodd 1997 & Winkler 1998). Even when the feedback is so linked, organisational communication of the information to relevant copytasters is distorted in the form of gatekeeping by organisational figures and noise in the form of the psychographic profiles of the copytasters and their superiors.

A survey of Australian gatekeepers and interviews with the market research departments of major print news organisations has reinforced the author's experience (33 years in the print news industry) that market research by Australian newspapers overall (as distinct from the major metropolitan newspapers) is patchy, poorly communicated to editorial departments, and even more poorly received. And according to the survey (304 valid responses of 320 gatekeepers surveyed), gatekeepers rate their exposure to market research as low. Henningham (1988, p.173) reported similar findings in a study of Australian print and broadcast journalists. He quotes Baker as saying that in a sample of print and broadcast journalists in Melbourne, only two had ever seen audience research data. Henningham notes that managements are "generally secretive" about the audience research they commission because of its commercial nature, and he adds (1988, p.173):

. . . from the television journalists' perspective, recommendations by researchers or consultants have trickled down to them from management-level only selectively — for example when a particular recommendation concerned a reporter personally.

Even in the larger papers, where editorial market research quite obviously was being conducted, copytasters reported a low level of exposure to the research. Further interviews with copytasters and with market research executives suggests the reasons are three-fold: the dictum of editorial independence, editorial gates which block the flow of market research information, and the psychographic profile of copytasters.

The dictum of editorial independence presents a problem upwards between editors and their superiors, sideways (between departments) and downwards (with journalists' acceptance or otherwise of editorial change).

Despite the findings of Altheide, Schlesinger and others, news organisations continue to pursue the aim of objectivity in news reporting — of disinterested, unbiassed and factual reporting of the news. They purport to do this by a variety of means, but specifically by referring their news choices to a range of "traditional" news values and by maintaining editorial independence from commercial or political

influence. The dictum of editorial independence, as noted earlier, holds that the reporting of news should be free from any influence that might “taint” its perceived objectivity and as a result it vests the ultimate power to decide what should be published or “spiked” in the editorial department, specifically the editor. The dictum often manifests itself in conflict between the advertising and editorial departments of a newspaper, when publication of a negative story (or non-publication of a positive story) is seen to be harmful to an advertiser.

Interviews with staff from the market research departments of Australia’s major print organisations show that it also has manifested itself in a reluctance to direct editorial departments to concentrate on specific categories of news or segments of the audience. When market research staff conduct research that is useful to copytasters in terms of feedback from their audience, they typically present the research findings to a senior editorial figure (usually the editor in chief) and the relevant editorial department head (features editor, sports editor, finance editor et al). Implementation of the findings is then left to the department head. In the interviews conducted, market research personnel were extremely reluctant to go further than simply presenting their findings and making general recommendations for change — to do more was seen as intruding upon editorial independence. In no case did a market research department at any newspaper do follow-up research to determine whether the findings has been implemented and if they had had any effect upon the audience.

The dictum of editorial independence, therefore, while it may have many admirable qualities, appears to act as a gate through which editorial market research finds it extremely difficult to pass.

If the notion of editorial independence blocks the flow of useful information between one department and another, the very structure of editorial departments provides further gates.

Newsrooms are characterised by their hierarchical structure. At the top, the editor provides a “vision” for the paper and transmits it to a range of deputy editors, day editors, night editors, associate editors, assistant editors and chiefs of staff, who in turn transmit that vision to a range of department heads, chief sub-editors, news editors and chief reporters, who then retransmit it to the next layer of journalists

below them. The capacity for reinterpretation in this process would in itself seem to be sufficient cause of any failure in the paper's mission to communicate in an interesting and relevant way with its readers — providing the editor's vision was appropriate in the first place.

While market research will help inform and shape the editor's vision, the utility of the research itself will be limited when it is presented only to a small group of editorial executives. In many cases, interviews with market researchers and copytasters revealed research findings were presented to the editor alone. The smaller the group exposed to the research findings, the greater the capacity for reinterpretation as they filter down through the newspaper's hierarchy and, hence, the greater the capacity for inefficient copytasting. In the survey of copytasters, three metropolitan department heads said they were never shown research and did not feel they needed to see it, because their editors told them all they needed to know.

Apart from the dangers inherent in the reinterpretation of information under such conditions, the political nature of a newsroom presents further problems. Organisational literature notes that knowledge is power and it may be in the interests of individuals to withhold knowledge. In this way managers retain power over subordinates — and in particular over potential competitors. Harris says members of organisations may deliberately use unclear language “to maintain the strategic advantage of being able to claim deniability” (p.112). This should be compared with the proposition that editors and others in possession of readership research findings hand on only an incomplete picture of the findings for a similar reason (deniability is useful when content changes fail to deliver the desired results) or to maintain an advantage over potential competitors in the newsroom.

Gatekeepers exist in a variety of guises in all organisations, and Harris recognises this when he addresses the problem posed by members of organisations who screen out important messages and fail to pass them on to others in the organisational hierarchy. In serial communication situations, where the information passes through a number of gatekeepers, significant distortion of the original message can occur. Harris reprints a figure from the American Management Association (1993, p.202) showing that only 20 percent of the original

meaning is received when a communication passes through six sets of gatekeepers.

Harris says (p.208) although it is difficult to prove “a direct causal link between information adequacy [information passed from management to employees] and performance, there clearly is a correlation. In better performing organisations, he says, employees are more satisfied with the quality and quantity of information supplied. He says:

As long as the downward communication is put into the context of the impact of the organizational culture, it would be correct to conclude that effective downward communication is a vital part of any organisation. (p.208)

Argyris (1974) characterised the “living system” he found, in a study of one US newspaper, as “competitive and low in trust” (p.32):

It seems fair to suggest that in this living system, the factors supporting ineffectiveness in problem-solving, decision-making, and implementation will tend to be greater than the factors supporting effectiveness. (p.33)

He further added:

It will tend to be difficult for participants to provide the valid information needed for solving important problems. Any search for alternatives will tend to be narrow in scope, any exploration of alternatives will tend to be brief, and any choice will tend to be influenced significantly by incomplete and distorted information. (p.33)

The problem of downward communication also is addressed by Simon (1976), who says (p.106) that “communication . . . is essential to the more complex forms of cooperative behavior”. He adds that no step in the administrative process is “more generally ignored or more poorly performed, than the task of communicating decisions”. He asks:

The question to be asked of any administrative process is: How does it influence the decisions of these individuals? Without communication, the answer must always be: It does not influence them at all. (p.108)

Simon acknowledges that superiors withhold information from subordinates in all organisations:

. . . the superior may use his exclusive possession of information as a means of maintaining his authority over the subordinate. It is hard to see that [this practice], which is usually a symptom of an incompetent and insecure executive, has any constructive function in organization. (p.163)

Harris also examines the use of goal-setting, leadership and power in organisations, and his conclusions are relevant to the operation and management of Australian newsrooms.

Although the quantification of circulation effect achieved by using readership research is inexact, it can nevertheless be seen as a form of goal-setting when applied to the work done by gatekeepers in newsrooms. If the output of readership research is seen as worthwhile — and it must be, because newspapers continue to conduct it — then it is reasonable to require gatekeepers to make use of it. But Harris says goal-setting in most organisations is “leader centered”. (p.447)

Unless the goals are discovered, and accepted mutually, managers still retain the power to accept or reject an employee’s work based on the manager’s perception of quality.

Harris’s description of goal-setting as “leader-centered” is applicable to the use of readership research in newspapers. Where research is actually editorially driven (as distinct from advertising or circulation-driven), interviews conducted by this author showed department heads in metropolitan daily newspapers were not involved in decisions about the content of the research or, indeed, in decisions about whether to conduct research at all. Further, some department heads volunteered the opinion that it was not their prerogative to participate in such decisions and that they would be told all they needed to know by the editor. Such an attitude suggests a lack of leadership on the part of senior management which could, perhaps, be attributed to a preference for management, rather than leadership. (Harris describes the attributes of leaders and managers and says both functionaries have important roles to play in organisations. But he says that “leaders work towards empowerment of subordinates whereas managers concentrate on developing power rather than people” (p.373). When combined with Harris’s earlier statement about the desire for deniability, it is possible that he is describing potent reasons for the lack of clear communication

about the application of readership research findings in Australian newsrooms.)

The third reason for copytasters' low level of exposure to market research lies in journalists' perception of the need for editorial independence and in the attitudes of journalists in general and copytasters in particular.

The dictum of editorial independence is related to journalism's perceived role of social responsibility — its mission to inform the public on issues of social consequence, no matter what the commercial or political consequences might be for the news organisation itself. Such a mission could be perceived as being at odds with the mandates of market research and, when journalists believe they perceive such a contradiction, they will feel free to ignore the research findings. Some journalists will take the issue further and decide to ignore all research findings as a matter of principle, an attitude noted by a number of journalism researchers. Robinson & Levy (1986), in particular, note that among US television journalists, even a limited, demographic knowledge of the audience is not deemed necessary — or even desirable — by a great many journalists (p.164). They point out that some journalists perceive a dichotomy between giving an audience what it says it wants, and the editorial freedom of the communicator. In other words, even basic demographic research work could impinge on journalistic freedom of expression and is therefore at best to be regarded with suspicion or, preferably, ignored all together. Gans (1980) also notes differences between gatekeepers and their audiences, saying they represent the upper middle class professional strata in society's hierarchies and they defend them via their story selection against the top, bottom and middle strata. Henningham (1988, p.185), also found that Australian broadcast journalists' "estimates of viewer interest are related much more closely to their own preferences than they are to actual viewer interests".

A dictum which gives journalists the freedom to ignore all or part of the market research produced by their own organisations would be, intuitively, congenial to many journalists because it is consonant with their attitude towards society in general. Studies show journalists to be small-l liberal in their political and social attitudes. In Australia,

studies in 1988, 1995 and 1996 by Henningham support evidence from around the world that journalists see themselves as being at least slightly left of centre in their political leanings and liberal in their views on a range of social issues. A 1996 study by Henningham compared the attitudes of journalists with those of members of the general public on a range of social and economic issues, finding journalists “significantly more liberal than the general public”.

This liberalism and streak of independence is also remarked upon by Harris, who notes the publishing, advertising and television industries are characterised as macho/tough guy-gal management cultures (p.70). Characteristics of such a culture include a high-risk business environment, with expensive outlays for risk; an environment of quick feedback on the success of decision-making; shared values of youth, intense pressure, fast pace, early rewards; extensive use of rites and rituals, bordering on the superstitious; and an individualistic attitude among employees.

Some of these characteristics are obvious in the newspaper industry. The call for quick feedback, for instance, is satisfied by supplying the daily circulation figures and referring to anecdotal evidence from reader phone calls. It is not, however, likely to be interested in feedback from market research which takes considerably longer to produce. High staff turnover could be a contributing factor to the blank spots identified by survey in copytasters’ knowledge of readership profiles for their papers. And the individualistic attitude of employees helps explain copytasters’ disregard for research findings.

Henningham (1997, p.616) comments on the public’s perception of journalists: “Popular perceptions of journalists indicate a particular personality. They are commonly seen as gregarious, nosy and thick-skinned.” He quotes social scientists Lichter, Rothman & Lichter who cite a number of factors which could produce a “collective personality style, by weeding out the meek, the timid, and the self-conscious”. Applying a personality test developed by H.J. Eysenck, Henningham found (p.621), among other things, that Australian journalists were, on average, more extroverted than the general public.

Paradoxically, the existence of group norms within newsrooms may help to reinforce individualistic attitudes towards outside influences

like market research. White & Vroman (1982, p.280) describe the apparent paradox by saying group norms

are standards against which the behaviors of individual members are compared . . . Over time, group member ideas, sentiments and views melt into shared ways of looking at their world. Individual beliefs and patterns influence norms and vice versa.

White & Vroman say that group norms give rise to Groupthink, which they explain as follows:

As members become more cohesive, the group can develop a “clubby” atmosphere that emphasizes exclusiveness and superiority. New information brought to the group may be seen as inappropriate or even threatening and therefore may be ignored (p.283).

There are several recognisable behaviours in groupthink:

Members ordinarily have a high esprit de corps and may characterize others as “quacks” or “cranks”. They feel so secure in their decisions that they nurture an illusion of invulnerability. These groups are quick to rationalize their bad decisions and to cloak that rationalization in an “illusion of morality” (they have only the highest goals in mind . . .). Self-censorship minimizes the likelihood that members having contrary views will manifest them, ensuring yet another “illusion of unanimity”. (p.283)

Anyone with more than a passing experience of an Australian newsroom will recognise the characteristics described by White & Vroman — which ensure that individuality, or at least a perception of it, is enshrined and outside interference is minimised. That such characteristics should exist in Australian newsrooms is hardly surprising or, indeed, sinister. An esprit de corps, involving the development of Groupthink, arises because newsroom executives work long hours under extreme deadline pressures. Moreover, they tend to work hours not worked by the population at large — night and weekend shifts, afternoon shifts, no public holidays — so their social contact can be limited to contact with each other, or at least to others who work in similar conditions, increasing the chances of the development of a “club” mentality and the rejection of new information. Not only do these conditions support the rise of Groupthink, they also provide an environment in which journalists are likely to lose touch with the needs and wants of their audiences. Henningham’s 1996 study reveals

significant differences on a number of scales between journalists and their audiences. The study shows “that journalists and the public in Australia have different ideological values, with the public significantly more conservative than journalists”. (p.95) It is worth noting that differences between journalists and their audiences were remarked upon by David Manning White in his seminal 1949 study (p.390).

Given the manifest differences in ideologies and the continuing circulation decline in newspaper readership in Australia, the need for change is critical. Robinson and Levy say journalists need to know more about the cognitive effects of their news choices upon their readers. Journalists, they say, need

... information concerning the needs, knowledge levels, cognitive maps, and information processing capabilities of their audiences ... If “informing the public” is really a *sine qua non* of the news profession, how much better informed does the public become as a result of the newscast? (p.164)

Such information will come only from the market research divisions of the major newspapers and broadcast organisations and, indeed, much relevant data is being produced by them even now. But until newsrooms can be convinced that it is in their interests to use that information, little hope can be held out for change.

An organisation’s culture is so fundamental to the way it operates, Harris says, that changing it is extremely difficult. Yet the culture exhibited in many newspapers in Australia is clearly inefficient. A culture in which senior journalists say they are largely unaware of the editorial market research done by their companies (survey findings 47.5 percent) and in which they say their organisations’ policies on using editorial research are poorly set out (mean response 1.85, std dev. 1.06 on a scale of 1 to 4, where 4 indicates research policy is easy to understand) militates against effective news decision-making. Further, a culture in which many copy-tasters listed their own advertising department as the entity most likely to abuse market research, and in which a fear of poorly constructed readership surveys is a recurring theme, is a culture clearly in need of change. Desired changes would include a greater understanding of and, perhaps, participation in the readership surveys by the copy-tasters themselves — a change likely to be achieved through greater contact between market research employees and copytasters.

But the need for change goes beyond a mere rapport between market researchers and copytasters, however difficult that may be to achieve. Both structural and newsroom leadership style changes are required. Newspapers serious about overcoming declining circulations must consider adding a review function to market research presentations, to check on or achieve compliance. Simon lists four functions for the review process and the first and second, at least, are absent from administrative procedures in newsrooms. Simon says the first function of review is to determine whether “work is being done well or badly at the lower levels of the hierarchy”. The second function is to influence subsequent decisions. Clearly, these functions are not occurring with relation to market research use by copytasters. Management practices in Australian newsrooms, for example, do not include any procedures to measure the extent to which readership research recommendations are complied with — hence editorial executives have an imprecise idea of the efficacy of editorial research.

Further, newspapers need to consider their management styles and training. Management training schemes often divide individuals into four categories of personal effectiveness, and recommend management use techniques of interpersonal communication to achieve the most effective performance from employees. Harris notes the four classifications of “supervisors” are: conscious competent; conscious incompetent; unconscious incompetent and unconscious competent (p.298) (classifications used by Australian Institute of Management courses attended by “line managers” — including editors — of Provincial Newspapers (Qld) during the 1980s). Briefly, the conscious competents are people who are aware of the reasons for their competence and so can replicate any successes and correct failures; conscious incompetents are people who are aware of their inadequacies and so are able to grow and learn; unconscious incompetents are people who are unaware of their inadequacies, assume they are competent, and hence are incapable of improvement; unconscious competents do many things right in their work, but do not know why they are successful and so are unable to replicate successes.

When these concepts are applied to Australian newspaper gatekeepers, many of them would appear to be unconscious

competents — competent professionals who recognise from audience reactions (circulation movements, letters to the editor, phone calls, commercial photo sales, commercial use of editorial database) that they have somehow connected with their audience, but are unable to pinpoint the exact reason why. Evidence for pressing the “unconscious competent” definition for gatekeepers exists in their professional competence in areas like news value recognition, rewrite capability and local knowledge, allied with a high survey rating for the value of readership research (mean 3.33, std dev. 0.93 on a scale of one to four). In answering a survey question about the importance to them personally of readership research, copytasters consistently volunteered the view that “it would be nice to know” if they were on the right track with their news choices. This uncertainty in the minds of gatekeepers is strong evidence that they belong in the “unconscious competents” category.

Their superiors, on the other hand, exhibit the characteristics of unconscious incompetents in their function as managers/leaders. The evidence for this lies in the lack of administrative procedures to ensure directives are carried out, in the lack of effective participation in decision-making by some department heads, and in a possible preference for management rather than leadership (developing power rather than people) allied with a lack of impetus for change.

Organisational management theory aims to lift all employees, ultimately, into the conscious competent class, where individuals are aware of the reasons for their successes and hence are able to repeat them, improving overall efficiency within the organisation.

For this to occur in Australian newspaper newsrooms, to the extent that gatekeeping choices reflect market research findings and contribute to the larger battle to reverse circulation losses, significant changes would have to occur to newsroom management practices.

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Chakravarti v Advertiser Newspapers: lessons for journalists

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The lower courts are now interpreting the High Court's judgement in *Chakravarti v Advertiser Newspapers Ltd*, which was handed down in May 1998. As the lower courts grapple with the decision, journalists must still produce reports of complex legal matters. Unfortunately for Australian journalists, the *Chakravarti* decision has done little to clarify the uncertainty surrounding defamation law. In fact, the decision can be criticised for increasing that uncertainty. This article examines the effect of the *Chakravarti* case on journalism by analysing the text of the various judgements and:

- extracting the legal principles which bind journalists;
- identifying areas where the persuasive opinion of judges may create an environment of uncertainty for journalists; and
- discussing ways of maximising privilege protection when reporting matters of public interest.

Freedom of speech and a person's right to protect their good name are fundamental human rights. When the two collide and a person's reputation is harmed in the name of freedom of speech, very often it is the media who pay: they pay out large sums in damages but the greater cost is the curtailment of freedom of expression. This has resulted in many journalists believing that defamation is a major impediment to freedom of speech and investigative journalism (Schultz 1998: 163). The High Court's decision in *Chakravarti v Advertiser Newspapers Ltd* suggests the tort of defamation could also be a major impediment to reporting complex court matters,

which have traditionally been viewed as protected reports (Eisenberg 1998, 10). The non-binding observations made by the various judges, when handing down their judgement in this case, increases rather than removes the uncertainty of the tort of defamation, which aims to balance freedom of speech and the right of the individual to protect their reputation. This balance is achieved by outlawing the publication of material, which has a tendency to injure a person's reputation, but allowing a defendant to defend the publication by:

- denying the publication is defamatory; or
- accepting that the publication is defamatory but avoiding liability because the publication is true, fair comment or privileged.

Privilege is seen as a strong defence, giving complete immunity to some publications. The decision in *Chakravarti v Advertiser Newspapers Ltd* suggests, however, that journalists must be careful when relying on the qualified privilege of a fair and accurate report of protected proceedings. This is particularly the case where the proceedings are complicated and confusing (Eisenberg 1998: 10). This article examines the legal and practical implications of the *Chakravarti Case* for journalists. Before embarking on this analysis however, it is important to consider the facts of the case.

The facts

The case arose from two articles published in the *Adelaide Advertiser* reporting on the Royal Commission, set up in March 1991, to investigate the near collapse of the South Australian State Bank. The plaintiff was Mandobendro Chakravarti, the executive director of Beneficial Finance Corporation's Australian (BFC) business division. BFC was a wholly owned subsidiary of the State Bank of South Australia. Chakravarti sued the proprietors of *The Advertiser* over two separate publications, which he claimed damaged his reputation. Both articles were based on evidence given to the Royal Commission. The first article dealt with the oral evidence of David Simmons, a former chairman of the bank's board and BFC. He gave evidence about a meeting with the SA Premier in which the resignations of BFC directors were discussed. The article was headlined 'Bannon accused on

resignations’ and included a photograph of four officers of BFC mentioned in the article, including Chakravarti. The first article related to evidence produced at the Royal Commission about the “real reason” for BFC executives resigning. It referred to all four executives together suggesting that Chakravarti was:

- one of the directors who had been forced to resign from BFC;
- involved in criminal or civil misconduct;
- involved in some dubious activity relating to “a Melbourne Joint Venture” which was not explained in the evidence (see Chakravarti 1998, 331).¹

Chakravarti claimed the article was not a true and accurate record of the proceedings, creating a false inference of him being involved in civil or criminal conduct and conducting himself in an improper manner as a director of BFC. He ordered a copy of the proceeding’s transcript, which indicated that *The Advertiser* had inaccurately recorded a response from the witness quoted. Based on this, Mr Chakravarti wrote a letter seeking an apology and correction from *The Advertiser*. No apology or correction was published. It was later revealed that the transcript had been incorrect and the reporter’s version of the evidence was correct. However, the court had to consider whether the report, as a whole, was inaccurate or unfair.

The second article led to a file note prepared by Simmons. The headline on page one read: ‘Loans may be criminal: bank chief’s diaries’. The story continued on page two under the headline ‘Loans may be criminal — diaries’. It included a “graphic” described as an excerpt from Mr Simmons’s diaries. It read: “Preliminary audit reveals Baker, Reichart (sic), Chakravarti and Martin have all loans which were not approved and were not authorised and are in excess of agreed benefits . . . May be criminal rather than civic (sic)”.²

Chakravarti claimed the second article inaccurately represented what went on in the proceedings and gave rise to false imputations, suggesting:

- he was engaged in criminal or civil misconduct in connection with loans;

- he was a party to a conspiracy;
- he received unapproved and excessive benefits which at the least amounted to civil misconduct;
- he had been involved in an illicit joint venture; and
- he was not a trustworthy person or executive (Chakravarti 1998, 333).

The action first came before a *bench* without a jury, who found the articles conveyed the defamatory meaning pleaded by the plaintiff. The defendant failed to convince the judge that the report was protected as a fair and accurate of the Royal Commission Proceedings. The plaintiff was awarded \$268,000 damages. The respondent appealed to the Full Court of the Supreme Court of South Australia, where the majority of the court found that the first article did not convey the defamatory meaning pleaded by the plaintiff. The second article was found to have contained defamatory statements but “the damages could relate only to parts of the article that failed to fairly report the commission” (Kenyon 1999: 12). The plaintiff’s damages were reduced to \$40,000. Chakravarti appealed to the High Court on three “broad issues” (Kenyon 1999: 12). They were:

1. Were the imputations pleaded defamatory? (Kenyon 1999: 12)
2. Was the report protected by fair report privilege under section 7 Wrongs Act or at common law? (Kenyon 1999: 12)
3. Was the quantum of damages appropriate? (Kenyon 1999: 12)

The legal findings of the High Court do not alter the general principles about the tort of defamation and the availability of the defence of fair report privilege. This case is important because of the observations made in the various judgements on how these principles should be applied to the facts of a case. Each of the three judgements delivered provides a different interpretation on how these principles apply to media publications. This lack of consensus between the judges of the High Court increases the uncertainty surrounding the application of the tort of defamation and may result in some journalists censoring complex stories. To assist journalists’ reporting legal and quasi-judicial

proceedings, this article will identify the areas of uncertainty and give some practical guidelines on how to avoid legal problems. First, it is important to extract the legal principles from the case.

The High Court's findings

All five judges agreed on the final outcome of the case. Gummow J and Gaudron J delivered the “leading judgement”, upholding the appeal from the Full Court of South Australia which reduced damages from \$268,000 to \$40,000 and sending the matter back to the Full Court to reassess damages (Chakravarti 1998: 325, 326). Brennan CJ and McHugh J delivered a separate judgement, agreeing with the leading judgement with the exception of two matters. Kirby agreed with the outcome of the remainder of the court but he made some general observations about the tort of defamation. While some of the issues arising from this case are not binding precedent, the judges’ observations are important, settling some principles of defamation law while adding to the uncertainty of others.

A majority of the court agreed that the tribunal of fact must first determine whether the imputations pleaded are defamatory and then decide whether the report is protected by privilege (Chakravarti 1998: 297, 334). Gummow J and Gaudron J dissented from the remaining judges on this matter, claiming that the court must first consider whether the report is fair and accurate and then decide whether the imputations were defamatory (Chakravarti 1998: 306).

A majority found the defence of fair report privilege must be applied to the whole publication, not the specific imputations pleaded. This means that if a part of the report is inaccurate or unfair, then the whole publication may lose its privilege protection. (Chakravarti 1998: 322, 359)

It was also agreed that to attract privilege protection under the fair report privilege an article must:

- be a report, in that it must not carry commentary;
- it must be accurate; and
- it must be fair.

The tests for fairness and accuracy are linked. The report must be substantially accurate and a substantial inaccuracy in the text of an article, which goes to the reputation of the person claiming damage to their reputation, will render the report unfair. The test for a “substantial inaccuracy or misrepresentation is whether the publication would substantially alter the impression that a reader would have received had he been present at the trial”. (Chakravarti 1998, 298, 309, 347).

A majority of the court (Kirby dissenting) found that the common law privilege protection applies in addition to section 7 Wrongs Act (Chakravarti 1998: 321-322).

Based on the decision in Chakravarti, an article summarising the evidence delivered to a Royal Commission (or other judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings) will only attract privilege protection in these circumstances:

1. The article is a *fair and accurate report* of the proceedings.
2. The article is limited to the evidence presented at the proceedings and not littered with commentary and the journalist's opinion.
3. The report conveys to the ordinary reader the impression of being present at the proceedings. Any substantially inaccurate impression renders the publication inaccurate and unfair.
4. The whole publication must be substantially accurate and fair: if it is found that the report contains a substantial inaccuracy or is substantially unfair, the whole report loses its protection and the plaintiff is entitled to recover on all defamatory imputations contained in the report.

These findings have been adopted in at least one case since the High Court handed down its decision (Warren 1999: 2). However, the ‘damage’ for journalists is in the detail of the three judgements, most notably in these areas:

- How the courts interpret the meaning of words.
- Reporting suspicion of guilt.
- The limitations of the privilege available to fair and accurate reports.

- The effect of apologies on a fair and accurate report.

The meaning of words

A majority of the High Court found that where the defendant seeks to avoid liability by relying on a defence (as opposed to denying the publication is defamatory), the court must first determine whether the imputations complained of by the plaintiff are in fact defamatory (Chakravarti 1998: 287, 334). This means the court must decide what the words mean, before considering whether a report is fair and accurate. This is a logical starting point, because the defence only comes into play if the words are defamatory.

The judges went on to make a number of observations about how words are to be interpreted. First, all five judges agreed (with slight variations) that, at common law, a plaintiff is not limited to the meanings pleaded if the imputations conveyed are less serious than those pleaded (Chakravarti 1998: 302-4, 313, 340-1)³. In case the court acknowledged the need for flexibility “if conveyed meanings do not correspond exactly with the pleaded meaning” (Kenyon 1999: 130), two judges rejected a similar ‘flexibility’ for defendants.

In Australia it has been accepted that where a publication contains a number of defamatory statements which “in their context may have a common sting” then “the defendant is entitled to justify the sting” (in Chakravarti 1998: 299). This has become known as the Polly Peck defence, which has been accepted in English and Australian courts since the mid-1980s (Kenyon 1999: 13). Brennan and McHugh have now cast doubt on that practice, stating “such approach is contrary to the basic rules of common law pleadings” (Chakravarti 1998: 299). They went on to say:

A plea of justification, fair comment or qualified privilege in respect of an imputation not pleaded by the plaintiff does not plead a good defence. It is immaterial that the defendant can justify or otherwise defend the meaning which it attributes to the publication. In our view, the Polly Peck defence or practice contravenes the basic principles of common law pleadings. In general it raises a false issue which can only embarrass the fair trial of the actions (Chakravarti 1998: 299).

While the other judges did not endorse these findings, the Polly Peck defence, which gives some latitude to defamation defendants, is now clouded in uncertainty. This issue was raised in the Supreme Court of the Australian Capital Territory in November 1999. Crispin J noted the statements of Brennan and McHugh about the availability of the Polly Peck defence and said that while he shared “the misgivings which their Honours expressed” he did not have to decide whether *Polly Peck (Holdings) v Telford & Ors* should be followed (*Steiner Wilson & Webster Pty Ltd t/as Abbey Bridal v Amalgamated Television Services Pty Ltd* 1999, par 199). If other courts do accept the reasoning of Brennan CJ and McHugh J (which it appears they might), the media will have to be more cautious when asserting the truth of publications and ensure they can prove the truth of all imputations pleaded.

The majority of the judges supported a more liberal approach to the pleading requirements for plaintiffs. This means it will be easier for plaintiffs to establish their case, provided the pleading covers the imputations they prove. However, if the Brennan CJ and McHugh J approach to the Polly Peck defence is accepted then defendants (who are frequently media organisations) will have to prove the truth of all imputations and not just the common sting. The judgement appears to have made it easier for plaintiffs to establish a defamation action thus making it harder for defendants to deny the defamatory nature of a publication. At the same time it is going to be harder for defendants to avoid liability by admitting the defamatory nature of a publication but justifying it because the defamatory imputations are true.

Kirby J (who delivered a separate judgement) did not consider the Polly Peck defence, but his reasoning on the interpretation of words is of significance for a number of reasons. First he observed that the meaning of words should be interpreted from the perspective of the “reasonable reader” or “ordinary man”, who has a greater capacity than a lawyer to draw inferences, particularly where the language is loose (Chakravarti 1998, 335). He noted the ordinary person “approaches perception . . . with a greater willingness to draw inferences and to read between the lines”. He cautioned: “Where words have been used which are imprecise, ambiguous or loose, a very wide

latitude will be ascribed to the ordinary person to draw imputations adverse to the subject. That is the price which publishers must pay for the use of loose language” (Chakravarti 1998: 335). Therefore journalists, and particularly headline writers, need to select their words carefully. For example, instead of using the word “diaries” is the headline of the second article, it would have been better to use “note” or “file”. Diary suggests that what is contained in it is true. Therefore the ordinary reader will place great weight to the information contained in a diary, as was seen when the Abbotts and Costellos sued Random House over allegations supposedly contained in a diary.

Kirby also made observations about how the ordinary or reasonable person forms an opinion on the meaning of a publication. Gaudron, Gummow, Brennan CJ and McHugh all agreed that when determining the meaning of words, the publication must be considered as a whole. This means that headlines, graphics and other prominent features of a publication must be considered in context of the whole publication (Chakravarti 1998: 316, Pearce 1998: 3).

Kirby went further than the rest of the court on this issue, stating that when interpreting the meaning of words, account must be taken of modern communication practices. He warned:

In a society increasingly used to the immediacy of ‘channel surfing’ with remote controls and accessing the Internet with computers, publishers must take special care with prominently published matter. This obligation clearly applies to headlines, captions, photographs, pictures and their digital equivalents (Chakravarti 1998: 337).

Kirby rejected the House of Lords decision in *Charleston v News Group Newspapers Ltd*, in which a defamation action by two prominent Australian actors was unsuccessful. The actors sued over a publication, which used photographs of their faces (without their consent) and superimposed them on the bodies of two near naked people engaging in pornographic acts. The court found that the publication was not defamatory because, reading the publication as a whole, the text of the article neutralised the harmful effect of the headline and photograph (Charleston 1995: 456, 457). In reaching their decision, the Lords “rejected the proposition that the prominent headline . . . may found

a claim in libel in isolation from its related text, because some readers only read headlines” (Charleston 1995: 456; and in Chakravarti 1998: 336).

Kirby specifically rejected this approach, claiming it “ignores the realities of the way in which ordinary people receive, and are intended to receive, communications of this kind” (Chakravarti 1998: 336). In effect, he is rejecting the bane and antidote principle, which recognises that the harmful effect of a defamatory imputation can be neutralised by statements of an “ameliorating kind” (Morosi 1980: 418n). In *Morosi v Radio Station 2GB*, the court found that in deciding the impression conveyed by a publication, the jury must ask whether the defamatory statement is “overcome by the contextual matter of an emollient kind as to eradicate the hurt and render the publication as harmless” (Morosi 1980, 419).

Kirby claims modern communication practices require a reinterpretation of the law to recognise that headlines and prominent features can assume a defamatory meaning of their own. Modern communication practices can be accommodated within the common law principles espoused by the rest of the court. If when reading a publication as a whole the text does not neutralise the harmful effect of the headlines, graphics etc., then the publication is defamatory. Obviously the harmful effect of a headline, graphic or photograph would be harder to overcome than a defamatory imputation arising in the text of a story. Headlines, sub headings, graphics and other prominent features will be more damaging than material of less prominence in the text. Instead of rejecting the legal basis on which the law lords made their decision in *Charleston*, Kirby should have criticised the way they applied the bane and antidote test to the facts. Kirby’s approach is essentially making the media summarise difficult stories into three or four words, which form a headline. This approach would enable a plaintiff to extract prominent elements of a story from the context in which they are published. The media would need to consider the “meaning” of each prominent aspect of a publication on two levels: first as they stand alone and then in the context of the whole publication, where they can assume a defamatory meaning if the reader decided to pay the publication greater attention. Thus a

balanced story can assume a defamatory meaning because of the harmful effect from its prominent features. Kirby notes that defamation is not a negligence-based tort (Chakravarti 1998, 347), therefore even the most carefully prepared publication can be defamatory if the impression conveyed to the reader harmed an identifiable person's reputation.

Kirby's approach skews the balance between freedom of speech and the protection of a person's reputation too far against freedom of speech.

The bane and antidote approach strikes a better balance between freedom of speech and protecting a person's reputation because the harmful effect of the story is determined by looking at the prominent features of the story in context. The harmful effects of prominent features of a story would have to be completely neutralised by other features, which is obviously quite difficult to achieve. If this is done however, the publisher should not be liable.

The practical effect of Kirby's observations is that journalists must place considerable emphasis on headlines, graphics, photographs and other devices used to capture audience attention when evaluating the accuracy of a report. Their use should not distort one aspect of the case to give a misleading impression. However, his observations increase the uncertainty about whether the harm of a headline or other prominent feature of an article can be overcome in the text of an article.

Reporting suspicions or allegations

The court also considered the difficulty in balancing the public interest in suspicions of guilt and the need to protect an individual from accusations of guilt. There is considerable uncertainty as to when a report of suspicion of guilt becomes elevated to an accusation of guilt.

Kirby observed that "although reporting that a person has been arrested and charged undoubtedly occasions damage to some degree to the reputation of that person, this must be tolerated on the basis of

the legitimate public interest in the reporting of such facts” (Chakravarti 1998: 337). He noted the mass media must report on matters of public interest such as a Royal Commission. But the law will only afford protection to fair and accurate reports of these proceedings “otherwise suspicion or accusation might be elevated in the public’s mind to guilt in fact” (Chakravarti 1998, 337). In *Chakravarti*, the two articles went further than reporting a suspicion of criminal or civil misconduct and gave the impression that Chakravarti was guilty of criminal or civil misconduct. The false inference of guilt arising from the reports helped to negate their accuracy. However, the High Court did not provide clear guidelines about when an accusation of guilt actually imputes guilt, leaving journalists in the dark over what can be published with safety. This issue is of relevance for two reasons: first, because of the uncertainty surrounding when a publication imputes guilt thus rendering it defamatory. Secondly, it is important because the elevation of a suspicion to an imputation of guilt will affect the fairness and accuracy of a report, and thus may limit the defences available to justify a defamatory publication.

Based on existing law and the observations of the court in *Chakravarti*, it is clear that by simply reporting the fact that charges have been laid does not give rise to an imputation of guilt (Chakravarti 1998: 337; Flahvin 1998: 9, *Mirror Newspapers v Harrison* 1982: 293). In many circumstances, however, journalists argue that more information than the basic charges is needed to satisfy the public interest, particularly where the case involves issues of public safety or political insight. The uncertainty surrounding when a suspicion becomes elevated to an imputation of guilt can result in the media censoring information of real public interest. *Chakravarti* does little to clarify how much information can be included in reports relating to suspicions of guilt before they are elevated to an imputation of guilt, and the law is less than certain on this issue. Flahvin cites two examples that highlight this uncertainty. In *Mirror Newspapers v Harrison* an action in defamation arose from a publication, which described charges laid against a suspect, but also carried a photograph of the victim and a description of the detective work that had led to the arrests. The High Court in *Harrison* found the article did not give rise to an imputation of guilt (Flahvin

1998: 9). Flahvin compares this case to an unreported decision of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, where a report was found capable of imputing guilt because it reported that “two school teachers had – after a lengthy police investigation – been charged with sexually assaulting students and suspended pending the hearing of the case”. (1998: 9).

Flahvin observes that while the principle in *Harrison* was approved by the Supreme Court of NSW, “journalists could be forgiven for thinking that in its application it (the principle) has been rendered quite useless” (1998: 9). This uncertainty again arises from the court’s apparent inconsistent application of the principles, rather than in the principles themselves. Where the courts are balancing rights, it is impossible to provide a line between right and wrong. Given the threat of censorship for fear of civil action in defamation, the court should aim to provide clear guidelines for journalists to balance these rights when they are providing information of public interest. However, this has not been done, therefore journalists must rely on common sense in drawing their own guidelines.

What is a fair and accurate report?

The court agreed that a defamatory imputation can be defended in the public interest if it is a fair and accurate report of the proceedings. Brennan CJ and McHugh J endorsed the test outlined in *Thom v Associated Newspapers Ltd* (1964), which states:

The report need not be verbatim, but to be privileged it must accurately express what took place. Errors may occur; but if they are such as not substantially to alter the impression that the reader would have received had he been present at the trial, the protection is not lost. If, however, there is a substantial misrepresentation of a material fact prejudicial to the plaintiff’s reputation, the report must be regarded as unfair and the jury should be so directed (Chakravarti 1998: 298).

This reasoning was supported by Gummow J and Gaudron J who observed:

It is well settled that a report need not be a complete report of the proceedings in question. Nor need it be accurate in every respect. It must however, be substantially accurate, and the question whether it is substantially accurate is a question of fact (Chakravarti 1998: 309).

Kirby agreed with the rest of the judges stating: "Where there is a dispute whether a report is fair and accurate, that dispute must be resolved as a factual question by comparing the relevant record of the proceedings with the matter complained of. The test has been expressed in terms of whether the report substantially alters the impression which its recipients would have gained had he or she been present during the proceedings." (Chakravarti 1998: 347).

He went on to say:

The mistakes and inaccuracy may deprive the defendant of the defence of fair report. Of their nature, they may also contribute to the damage done to the plaintiff's reputation. They may therefore warrant consideration in the context to identify what it is about the matter complained of that is defamatory of the plaintiff (Chakravarti 1998: 347).

Kirby stated the court must look at the entirety of a report to determine its accuracy, but when considering its fairness, particular attention will be paid to headlines, and graphics "which have the object of capturing maximum public attention" (Chakravarti 1998: 347).

The relationship between fairness and accuracy was also explored by Kirby. "A report must retain substantial accuracy in all material respects. If it contains untrue statements of a material fact, which have the potential to damage the reputation of the person referred to, the report will be unfair." (Chakravarti 1998: 347) A substantial inaccuracy strips the publication of its privilege protection, exposing the publisher to liability for all of the defamatory imputations contained therein, even if the rest of the information is substantially accurate. The rest of the court supported this principle (Chakravarti 1998: 347, 314). In essence the court will weigh up the inaccuracies, by comparing the report to what was said in the proceedings, and if a substantially inaccurate impression arises then the report is unprotected by fair report privilege. The inaccuracy contaminates the whole report, even if the

reporter has been extremely diligent. The loss of fair report privilege is a serious blow to a publisher, who would have to look for some other way of defending the publication.

Commentary can contaminate report

To be a report, a publication must accurately summarise the events. The summary does not have to be correct in every sense, but it must be substantially correct. Kirby noted that a commentary can contaminate a report, thus rendering it unprotected under privilege because it does not accurately record what is going on.

To the extent that (a publication) goes beyond a report, and the reporter engages in comment, description and elaboration of the reporter's own, the privilege provided for a report will be inapplicable and may be lost entirely . . . Excessive commentary or misleading headlines which amount to commentary run the risk of depriving the text of the quality of fairness to attract the privilege (Chakravarti 1998: 346).

Kirby's observations about commentary are important for two reasons:

- The use of comment, description and independent elaboration could see the report classified as a commentary and not a report of the proceedings.
- The comments could render the publication inaccurate and unfair even if they appear in a prominent headline.

If the commentary contaminates the fair report privilege, all is not lost, because the publisher may be able to rely on the defence of fair comment or political communication privilege if the issue involves government and political matters. (Based on the High Court's interpretation of government and political matters in *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings would be covered). Although the Royal Commission related broadly to political and government matters, this issue was not raised by the defendant in *Chakravarti*. Both sides agreed that because it was a report of a Royal Commission journalists were expected to "ensure the report was strictly accurate" (Chakravarti 1998, 334). This raises the question

whether the court will expand its reasonableness guidelines set out in *Lange* to include a requirement that a report of judicial, legal or political proceedings must also be fair and accurate⁴.

With respect to the fair comment, true facts are required to enable the public to assess the value they will put on a person's opinion. The defence will be lost if the facts stated are not true. The political communication privilege recognises the public's right to take part in the democratic process, and requires information published to be reasonable. In some circumstances, for example reports of court and parliament, the communication about political and government matters may only be reasonable if they are substantially accurate. Therefore, a journalist cannot avoid their obligation to accurately report the facts of a legal or quasi-legal matter.

Apologies and the issue of fairness

Section 7 Wrongs Act (SA) gives an aggrieved person a right of reply, which if refused without negotiation will be taken into account in determining the reasonableness of the response. All five judges considered whether the letters written by Mr Chakravarti were reasonable thus barring *The Advertiser* from relying on section 7 Wrongs Act SA to defend publication. Gaudron J and Gummow J, with whom Brennan CJ and McHugh J agreed, concluded that the question of reasonableness was not a live issue (Chakravarti 1998: 321; Pearce 1998: 4). Before reaching this conclusion, they found that the "reasonableness" of a letter of reply is a "value" judgement (Chakravarti 1998: 321).⁵ This does little to clarify what is a reasonable reply, however they noted:

- Generally, it will be unreasonable for the reply to controvert the fairness and accuracy of the report in question (Chakravarti 1998, 320; Pearce 1998, 4).
- A "measured assertion of a belief", which is subsequently shown to be incorrect, is not necessarily unreasonable (Chakravarti 1998, 320; Pearce 1998, 4).

- The consideration of reasonableness is not limited to the facts known at the time the letter was sent (Chakravarti 1998: 321, Pearce 1998, 4).

These observations that provide little guidance for an editor facing the decision of whether to publish a reply. Although these guidelines represent the majority of the court's opinion, an editor may find Justice Kirby's observations more helpful (and easier to understand). Pearce suggests editors should keep a copy of Justice Kirby's guidelines handy for ready reference (Pearce 1998, 5).

Kirby J went further than his fellow judges, suggesting that the Wrongs Act provision must be interpreted in light of its aims and:

- For a letter to be reasonable it must be more than a mere "request for a retraction . . . letter of protest or insult" (Chakravarti 1998: 351; Pearce 1998: 5).
- The request and report must be contemporaneous (Chakravarti 1998: 351; Pearce 1998: 5).
- The response must be objectively reasonable (Chakravarti 1998: 351; Pearce 1998: 5)
- Reasonableness is objectively measured in terms of the purposes of the provision: to correct incorrect information that has been published (Chakravarti 1998: 351; Pearce 1998: 5).
- In determining reasonableness the court will look at the length of the letter/statement; the terms in which it is expressed and its ability to negate harm to a person's reputation (Chakravarti 1998: 351; Pearce 1998: 5).
- The concept of "reasonableness" does not include a concept of editorial veto; but publishers are entitled to respond to the letter by way of an editorial note (Chakravarti 1998: 351; Pearce 1998: 5).
- A refusal by an editor to negotiate about the publication of a letter of correction can be taken into account in determining the reasonableness of the letter (Chakravarti 1998: 352).

This discussion suggests editors can no longer afford to refuse to publish letters of correction or clarification, instead they should opt to publish the letter with a note clarifying the claims of the letter writer

Effect on journalists

This discussion reveals that the *Chakravarti* decision does not alter the law governing fair report privilege but it does affect the way the law will be applied to the facts a case, raising a variety of issues for journalists.

First, journalists have to pay particular attention when reporting complex court matter, ensuring that any report produced is a substantially accurate account of the proceedings. Journalistic commentary or opinion and sensationalisation of some parts of the report or headline or graphic could render the “report” inaccurate or unfair. When considering the “impression” of the report, journalists must remember modern reading practices and pay particular attention to the harmful effects of headlines, graphics and photographs.

When writing reports, journalists should use “precise” language, because “loose” language could give rise to more inferences.

When reporting allegations of suspicion of guilt, the reporter must be careful not to elevate the accusations to an inference of actual guilt by providing too much information or indicating that the suspicion emanates from a particularly reliable source. And finally, when a person writes a “reasonable” letter of clarification, then editors should think seriously about running the letter with an explanatory editorial note.

If a report is littered with commentary, then a reporter will need to structure the report to ensure it is protected by fair comment or the expanded political communication privilege.

Practical steps to minimise risks

Newspapers reporting complex legal matters can take a number of practical steps to maximise their chances of relying on the fair report privilege.

All court reporters should have excellent shorthand skills. Shorthand is an underrated skill and is essential if court reporters are to ensure their report is fair and accurate.

Any commentary about cases should be run in separate articles based on the actual report. This will ensure that the commentary does not contaminate the report. The report would be defensible as a fair and accurate report of the proceedings and the commentary would then be defended as fair comment. Any harmful imputations arising from the commentary will be defensible provided:

- the commentary is an honest opinion;
- about a matter of public interest; and,
- the facts upon which the commentator is basing his/her opinion are set out (by referring to the report) in the text of the publication; and
- these facts are true or absolutely privileged, remember however, that the test for truth and privilege brings up the issues raised in this article: the facts must accurately and fairly reflect what was said in the proceedings and when proving the truth of statements, it is not enough to prove the common sting.

If the report and commentary are run in the same story, the commentary could render the report unfair. If the report is unfair, then it loses its privilege protection completely and the journalists and publisher will be liable for the defamatory imputations it contains, unless they can be defended on some other basis. But caution must also be exercised when running stories side by side because the court will look at the publication as a whole. If a commentary is run as a side-bar story under a common headline, the commentary may be regarded as a part of the whole story and run the risk of contaminating the fair report privilege. So when laying out reports of judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings, think carefully about where commentaries are placed.

It may be possible to defend mass reports of judicial and quasi-judicial reports under the expanded duty/interest privilege recognised to protect reports to the general public of political and government

matters. To attract this expanded qualified privilege the report must be reasonable and not actuated by malice. Whether a report is reasonable is determined on the circumstances of each case, but a publisher will not be reasonable unless:

- there were reasonable grounds for believing the imputation was true;
- proper steps were taken to verify the accuracy of the information;
- the imputations were not believed to be untrue; and
- a response was sought from the person defamed and the response published wherever practicable (Lange 1997: 13).

These factors are only guidelines as to what constitutes a reasonable publication. Given that the public only has an interest in receiving fair and accurate reports of judicial and quasi-judicial matters, it could be argued that to be reasonable the report would also have to be fair and accurate. Therefore the practical issues raised by *Chakravarti* will still have to be addressed.

The *Lange* defence also gives rise to a right of reply and highlights the need for editors to allow people, who claimed to be defamed by reports of judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings, to publish letters in response.

When reporting judicial or quasi-judicial proceedings, journalists should use precise language and ensure all reports are balanced, paying particular attention to prominent features because the harmful effect in these prominent features will be harder to correct than imputations arising in the text.

When reporting charges and suspicions of guilt, the reporter should not include too much information about the investigative process nor suggest the information they have published has come from an official source. For example, it could make a difference to suggest that information published had been included in a person's diary when in fact it merely formed part of a file note. The ordinary person considers that people publish the truth in diaries, so they tend to give more weight to information contained in them.

If a publisher cannot prove the truth of all of the imputations arising from a publication, then they should seriously consider leaving the information out or considering rephrasing the statement to ensure it can be defended as fair comment or some form of privilege.

Conclusion

Fair and accurate reports of judicial and quasi-judicial proceedings are protected reports for the purposes of the tort of defamation. Chakravarti has not removed that defence, it has just interpreted what is a fair and accurate report. The court has sent a clear message that no concessions will be made for the mass media who sensationalises a report, in fact they have to assume that they are publishing to a more inattentive audience. When publishing to this inattentive audience, which forms its impressions from prominent features of a story, the media must not convey a misleading impression. This suggests balance and accuracy are the key to maintaining the fair report privilege.

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Notes

- 1 For the full text of the first article see Kirby's judgement on page 331.
- 2 For the full text of the second article see Kirby's judgement on page 332-333.

- 3 In New South Wales each imputation is a cause of action, therefore each pleaded meaning must be strictly interpreted. The High Court, in *Chakravarti*, has refused to adopt this practice at common law. (see Kenyon 'Pleading defamatory meaning, fair report defences and damages: *Chakravarti* in the High Court' (1999) 7 *Torts Law Journal* 9 at 13.
- 4 This issue will be discussed again later in this article.
- 5 The observations about section 7 Wrongs Act SA are applicable to most states in Australia, because right of reply provisions apply pursuant to these sections: Victoria ss5(3), 5(A)(3) Wrongs Act; Queensland Defamation Act 1889, s13(4); Western Australia, s 354 Criminal Code; Tasmania s 13(2)(b) Defamation Act 1957; ACT s5 Defamation Act Amendment Act 1909; NT s6(1), proviso (b) Defamation Act 1938.

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The corruption watchdog condemned – the media criticised in letters to the editor

Stephen Tanner

Media treatment of political corruption remains an under-researched academic topic, despite newspapers devoting considerable space to allegations of wrong-doing by public figures. This paper looks at the media's coverage of the Metherell affair in NSW as judged by readers in the letters to the editor columns of four newspapers. The study found that readers were not only interested in corruption, but that they use the letters to the editor columns of newspapers to participate in the debate over the labelling of conduct and the consequences that should be applied. Significantly, the study also found that letter writers tended to be more critical of the coverage of this issue by the media, including named journalists and organisations, than they were of the views of fellow readers.

In June 1992 then New South Wales Premier Nick Greiner and his Environment Minister, Tim Moore, were found to have acted corruptly in appointing former ministerial colleague-turned-independent MP Dr Terry Metherell to a lucrative public service position so as to clear the way for a by-election in his seat of Davidson. (They were subsequently cleared.) In his report, the head of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC), Ian Temby QC, highlighted the role of the media in a democracy, particularly as an anti-corruption mechanism. Pointing to the large number of letters to the editor published on this issue, he said: "It did not take long for

the media to work themselves into a lather of righteous indignation, although it does seem that on this occasion the public led and they [the media] followed” (ICAC 1992, p.4).

While the role of the media as an anti-corruption mechanism has been dealt with elsewhere (Tanner 1998, 1999; Doig 1983; Masters 1992; Dickie 1990; Simons 1991), little attention has been paid to the role of letters to the editor columns as a forum through which readers can discuss the media’s treatment of this issue. In Australia, letters to the editor columns are one of the most popular and widely read sections of a newspaper (Schultz 1996, p.17). Letters to the editor pages are important for a number of reasons. They provide a barometer of public feeling on issues, and act as an important feedback mechanism for the newspaper, letting journalists and management know what readers feel about issues, including their own handling of those issues. These pages also provide a forum through which readers can debate issues with each other.

Corruption is by its very nature an emotive topic. There is disagreement among academics as to what actually constitutes corruption and the impact of such conduct on society (see, for example, Heidenheimer et al 1990). This disagreement can also be seen in the wider community and between elites and non-elites. Because of this, it would be expected that a corruption scandal — particularly one involving a high profile political leader — would attract considerable coverage not only in the news pages, but in the letters to the editor columns as well. One reason for this is highlighted by Gronbeck, who argues that people “demand to participate in [the] ritualistic deposition” of those who have been accused of corrupt conduct (1978, p.156). In fact research conducted by the NSW ICAC shows that people believe writing a letter to the editor is one way in which they could respond to corruption (1996, p.14).

While popular, these columns have also been widely criticised by readers who have been known to adopt a proprietorial air when it comes to the letters page and the contents thereof (Kelleghan 1995, p.8). For example, newspapers are often criticised for being biased in their selection of letters, for not publishing letters, for refusing readers

a right of reply and for editing contributions from readers.¹ Newspapers generally publish only a small proportion of the letters they receive from readers.² When selecting letters for publication, editors apply some of the same criteria as they do for news pieces. These can include newsworthiness, the contribution the letter makes to a debate, its length, coherence and whether it is libellous or not (Kirkman 1998, p.1).

A number of researchers have sought to profile letter writers in an attempt to determine whether the views they express are representative of the wider community. According to Fowler, letter writers constitute a self-selected rather than random sample, and the attitudes expressed “would be more likely to be more strongly held, better expressed and more negative than those of the average member of the community” (1981, p.43). In an earlier study Davis and Rarick concluded that letters to the editor provide “the irate, the antagonist, the displeased, a chance to speak out and be heard” (1964, p.108), although as Bogart has found, editors tend not to discriminate against letters holding a view contrary to that of the paper (cited in Pritchard and Berkowitz 1991, p. 390).

The purpose of this study is to analyse the public’s reaction to the coverage of the Metherell affair in four newspapers — the *Sydney Morning Herald* (SMH), the *Daily Telegraph Mirror* as it was (DTM), the *Australian* and the *Australian Financial Review* (AFR). The paper is not so much interested in whether newspaper coverage of an issue is influenced by contributions from readers, this issue being addressed in a larger project the author is currently undertaking. Rather, the paper examines:

- (1) the level of criticism or support individual journalists and media organisations receive in letters to the editor columns;
- (2) whether readers tend to focus more on news or editorial columns; and
- (3) the extent to which readers use these columns to engage in debate with each other.

Given what has been said previously about letter writers, it is hypothesised that letters to the editor on this issue are more likely to be critical than approving in their response to coverage and that there would be a healthy exchange of opinions between correspondents.

Furthermore, it is expected that letter writers are expected to respond to both news articles and editorials, the determining factor being their content.

These papers were selected for a number of reasons. The *SMH* was an obvious choice, being the main quality daily in NSW. The *DTM*, on the other hand, provided an obvious contrast, as NSW-based and popular, with the second-largest daily circulation in Australia. In the lead-up to the period covered by the Metherell affair, the four newspapers enjoyed the following circulation: *Australian* (148,574); *SMH* (267,267); *DTM* (491,197); and *AFR* 76,673 (Australian Press Council 1992, pp.154, 163). While the *SMH* is a broadsheet, the *DTM* is a tabloid. Given the different reputations that broadsheets and tabloids generally enjoy, the former tending to be regarded as “quality” publications, the latter as “popular”, it is tempting to hypothesise that their coverage of the inquiry would differ substantially and that the responses of letter writers may also vary. The *Australian* and the *AFR* were selected because they are national dailies and hence may be inclined to take a broader, less state-centric approach to their coverage of the appointment. The *AFR* was also chosen because of the interest it had shown in Nick Greiner’s managerialist approach to government during his term as NSW premier. While the broadsheet versus tabloid dichotomy again shows up in the choice of these two newspapers, in this instance it is potentially less meaningful, given that the broadsheet *Australian* and the tabloid-sized *AFR* are both recognised as ‘quality’ publications.

Background to the Metherell affair

At the time of the Metherell appointment, Greiner led a minority government that had to negotiate its legislative program with five independents, including Metherell. The latter’s appointment to the public service paved the way for a by-election the Greiner Government won, although leaving it still in a minority position. Greiner’s involvement in the appointment incurred the wrath of the remaining independents who demanded that unless he and Moore resign as premier and minister respectively, they would support a change of

government. The independents were incensed in part because Greiner had won office in 1988 on a platform that included a pledge to clean up public sector corruption. Greiner's promise had also been interpreted to include opposition to jobs-for-the-boys style appointments, a label subsequently applied to the Metherell appointment. In their appearances before the ICAC and during negotiations with the independents, Greiner and Moore both denied that their conduct was corrupt. However under the peculiar definition of "corrupt conduct" contained within the ICAC Act, their conduct was so classified. Greiner and Moore immediately appealed the finding to the NSW Court of Appeal, arguing that their conduct was no different to that of Greiner's predecessors as premier and that it did not amount to corruption as the term was popularly defined. Despite their appeal, the independents called for their resignations. Greiner and Moore succumbed to the independents' demands, even though they were subsequently cleared of corruption by the NSW Court of Appeal.

Media coverage

The Metherell affair attracted enormous media coverage. The four newspapers selected for this study published 940 articles and 293 letters to the editor on this issue over a four-and-a-half month period (Table 1). (All articles and letters were sourced from the one edition of each newspaper. In each case this was an edition that was readily available outside NSW. While clearly there are disadvantages with such an approach, in that the reader is not able to follow changes in editorial emphasis which may occur over editions throughout the day — in the case of articles if not letters to the editor — it does nonetheless provide for a certain consistency across the data.)

Given the small time frame involved (four and a half months from the announcement of Metherell's resignation from Parliament and appointment to the public service to Greiner's resignation as a member of parliament), it was decided to include all letters to the editor in the study.

Table 1: Distribution of letters & articles compared

News- paper	Total letters		Total articles		% difference
	No.	%	No.	%	
SMH	145	49.48	374	39.78	+9.70
DTM	100	34.12	256	27.23	+6.89
Aust.	46	15.69	243	25.85	-10.16
AFR	2	0.68	67	7.12	-6.44
Total	293		940		

As Table 1 shows, the Metherell affair certainly provoked interest among readers of three of the four newspapers studied — the *SMH*, *DTM* and *Australian*. The small number of letters published in the *AFR* is perhaps indicative of its different focus, although it can be argued that the *AFR* tended to publish fewer articles in total on a daily basis than the other newspapers. Significantly, the percentage contribution of letters to the editor on this issue, compared with articles, was down in both the national dailies. Whereas the *SMH* published almost 50 percent of all letters analysed in this study and the *DTM* nearly 35 percent, the *Australian* and the *AFR* published fewer than 16 percent and one percent respectively, a much lower contribution than their share of total articles.

Despite this, however, the Metherell affair was of sufficient interest to readers in other states to provoke letters to the editor from them. This is highlighted in Table 2 which traces the origin of letters on a state-by-state basis. This suggests that while the particular incident was focussed on NSW, the issues being addressed were of much wider concern. In fact, a number of the letters on this issue that originated outside NSW compared the Metherell affair with other similar incidents involving public figures in those states. There were also a small number that drew comparisons with incidents that occurred overseas.

Table 2: Origin of letters by state

	NSW	VIC	WA	QLD	SA	TAS	ACT	NT
SMH	143	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
DTM	99	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Aust.	23	7	4	8	3	0	1	0
AFR	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Total	266	7	4	10	3	0	3	0

As Table 2 shows, the overwhelming proportion of letters to the editor on this issue were from NSW. This is not surprising, as it reflects the state focus of the issue. What is significant, however, and perhaps reflects the strength of community concern about ethical issues involving MPs, is the fact that the Metherell affair did attract letters from correspondents in other states, particularly among readers of the *Australian*.

As Table 3 reveals, the letters to the editor columns were used mainly by members of the public to participate in the debate over the Metherell affair. Nearly 93 percent of published letters were from people who professed no political, professional, academic or journalistic interest in the issue. Of the professionals who had letters published, two were concerned about the impact of the appointment on public attitudes towards the EPA,³ two engaged in an interdisciplinary debate over legal representation,⁴ one was a letter of advice from a retired public servant who said he could have told Greiner quickly how to resolve his problem,⁵ and a response to a letter from Opposition leader Bob Carr which sought to discredit Greiner's achievements as premier.⁶ The letters in the political category included federal and state MPs,⁷ a mayor,⁸ a former federal president of the Liberal Party,⁹ a union official,¹⁰ and a party official.¹¹ Letters in the academic category included historians and political scientists.¹²

Table 3: Identity of letter writers

	SMH		DTM		Aust.		AFR		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Citizen	134	92.4	97	97.0	40	87.0	1	50.0	272	92.8
Political*	3	2.1	3	3.0	4	8.7	1	50.0	11	3.8
Profess- ional	5	3.4	0	0	1	2.2	0	0	6	2.0
Academic	3	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1.0
Journalist	0	0	0	0	1	2.2	0	0	1	0.3
Total	145		100		46		2		293	

* This includes MPs, local government representatives, union officials, and people holding positions in political parties.

Acknowledging the media

There were 92 letters to the editor (31.39 percent of the total) that acknowledged or responded to journalistic contributions or other letters to the editor on this issue (see Table 4). By far the greatest influence on letter writers appeared to be journalistic contributions. Across the four newspapers 79 letters (27 percent) acknowledged the influence of the media, compared with just 13 (4.4 percent) which directly responded to other letters.

Table 4: Responses to the media and other letter writers

	SMH	DTM	Aust.	AFR	Total
To specific articles	19	5	6	2	32
To that newspaper generally	3	2	0	0	5
Other media/ media generally*	18	5	18	1	42
To other letters	5	1	7	0	13
Total	45	13	31	3	92

* Other media category includes specific references to news items in other media and the media generally.

As Table 5 shows, more than 52 percent of letters to the editor on this issue published in the *Australian*, and nearly 28 percent of *SMH* letters were written in response to, or acknowledged, journalistic contributions or the role of the media generally. The response rate in *DTM* letters was much lower at 12 percent, while both *AFR* letters acknowledged identified articles. The response to other letters was relatively low. The greatest reader to reader interaction appeared to take place in the letters to the editor column of the *Australian*, where more than 15 percent of letters acknowledged that they were responding directly to comments made by other readers. Of the 247 letters to the editor published in the other three newspapers only six acknowledged that they were in response to other letters. Of those who did acknowledge other letters, all were critical of, or took issue with, comments made by the writer of the particular letter. Only one¹³ acknowledged that the other letter writer¹⁴ had made some valid points.

Table 5: Responses as a percentage of individual newspaper totals

	SMH	DTM	Aust.	AFR	Total
To specific articles	13.1	5.0	13.0	100.0	10.9
To that newspaper generally	2.1	2.0	0	0	1.7
Other media/media generally	12.4	5.0	39.1	50.0	14.3
<i>Sub total (media)</i>	<i>27.6</i>	<i>12.0</i>	<i>52.2</i>	<i>150.0*</i>	<i>27.0</i>
To other letters	3.4	1.0	15.2	0	4.4

* Note the sub total for the *AFR* adds up to more than 100% because one letter referred to both a specific article and the media generally.

One conclusion to be drawn from this is that letters to the editor were of little acknowledged influence on the majority of letter writers, although it is difficult to argue this authoritatively. For example, it is difficult to predict what proportion of letters to the editor on a particular issue are published, and whether there is an attempt on the part of the editor, conscious or otherwise, to provide a balanced cross-

section of the views aired in letters.¹⁵ Certainly in this case there appeared to be little dialogue between writers.¹⁶ This suggests that letters columns provide less of a forum for reader to reader exchanges than they do for readers to respond to journalistic contributions. The full break-down of responses to journalistic contributions is contained in Table 6. It shows that readers of the two Sydney dailies divided their responses almost equally between the newspaper in which their own letter was published and other media. In the case of the *SMH*, 22 out of 40 letters (55 percent) responded to pieces in the newspaper of publication, compared with 18 letters (45 percent), which dealt with contributions in other media or the media generally. This compared with a 58.3 percent (7 out of 12) response rate to pieces in the *DTM* by *DTM* readers, 25 percent (6 of 24) in the *Australian* and 100 percent (2 of 2) in the *AFR*.

Perhaps significantly, of the letters which responded to the newspaper of publication, the overwhelming proportion identified the article with which they took issue or supported. In the case of the *SMH*, this was 86.4 percent (19 of 22 letters), 71.4 percent in the *DTM* (5 of 7), 100 percent in the *Australian* (6 of 6) and 100 percent in the *AFR* (2 of 2). Those letters which responded to specific articles in the newspaper of publication did not focus on a particular type of article. As the final column in Table 6 reveals, there were 32 articles in this category, with 11 responding to news pieces, 11 to editorials and 10 to comment pieces. None responded to or acknowledged cartoons. There was no noticeable trend either within or between the newspapers. That is, letter writers seemed to respond to comments in editorials, news and comment pieces alike.

While it can be argued that, based on the above breakdown, readers seem more inclined to use the letters to the editor columns to respond to journalistic contributions, the level of acknowledgment is still relatively low. To illustrate, fewer than 11 percent of all letters on this issue responded to specific articles in the newspaper of publication, 1.7 percent to that newspaper generally, and 14.3 percent to other identified media or the media generally. That is, fewer than 27 percent of letters admit an intellectual debt (positive or negative) to the media.

Table 6: Responses in letters by type of article/journalist or media organisation

	SMH		DTM		Aust		AFR		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>(1) Specific articles</i>										
News	8	5.5	1	1.0	1	2.2	1	50.0	11	3.8
Opinion	5	3.4	1	1.0	4	8.7	0	0	10	3.4
Editorials	6	4.1	3	3.0	1	2.2	1	50.0	11	3.8
Sub total	19	13.1	5	5.0	6	13.0	2	100.0	32	10.9
<i>(2) That paper generally</i>	3	2	2	2.0	0	0	0	0	5	1.7
Sub total	3	2.1	2	2.0	0	0	0	0	5	1.7
<i>(3) Other media / media generally</i>										
TV	*3	2.1	3	3.0	^11	24.0	0	0	17	5.8
Radio	**1	0.7	1	1.0	0	0	0	0	2	0.7
Print	***2	1.4	#1	1.0	^^1	2.2	0	0	4	1.4
Not specific	12	8.3	0	0	6	13.0	1	50.0	19	6.5
Sub total	18	12.4	5	5.0	18	39.1	1	50.0	42	14.3
Total (all)	40	27.6	12	12.0	24	52.2	3	150.0	79	27.0

* One of these letters refers simply to “television” and “TV” without identifying the program.

** The letter referred to herein does not refer to a specific radio program or station.

*** These letters refer only to a “newspaper” and “headlines”, rather than to a specific article or newspaper.

This letter refers to “in the paper”. Whilst it is tempting to place it in the *DTM* general category, the possibility of cross media readership precludes this.

^ The letters in this category refer either to a specific program or to the presenter thereof.

^^ This letter refers simply to “editorials across the country”.

If the other media/media generally category is set aside, it can be seen that fewer than 23 percent of letters to the editor published on this issue acknowledge the influence or contribution of an identified media organisation, journalist, commentator, or another reader/writer. As Table 7 shows, this represents just 67 letters to the editor — 29 in the *SMH*, 24 in the *Australian*, 12 in the *DTM*, and 2 in the *AFR*. As a proportion of total letters published by each of the newspapers, the *AFR* was the highest at 100 percent¹⁷, followed by the *Australian* at 52 percent, the *SMH* at 20 percent and the *DTM* at fewer than 12 percent.

Table 7: Letters which identify a specific article/journalist/organisation

	SMH	DTM	Aust	AFR	Total
Specific (to newspaper)	22	7	6	2	37
Other identified media (By program/journalist)	2	4	11	0	17
Responding to other Letters	5	1	7	0	13
Total	29	12	24	2	67

Finally, writers responded to a small number of articles and letters. For example, in the case of the *SMH*, the six writers who responded to editorials were in fact responding to only four of the 17 editorials published on this issue by the *SMH*. Of the six responses, three responded to one editorial (May 7)¹⁸, and three to three other editorials (June 20,¹⁹ August 3²⁰ and August 14²¹). The eight *SMH* letters which acknowledged particular news items all wrote in response to separate news stories,²² while the five letters which responded to opinion/comment pieces were in fact responding to just two articles. One was a response to a column by Tony Stephens on May 13,²³ the other four to a column by Gerard Henderson on June 23.²⁴ In Henderson's case, he was not a staff journalist, but an independent commentator who wrote weekly articles for the paper. Given that there were 374 news items, opinion/comment pieces, editorials and stand-alone cartoons published in the *SMH* on this issue, it appears that in terms of overall

influence, specific articles appeared to have little direct (or acknowledged) effect on letter writers. That is, just 14 of 374 *SMH* articles (representing 3.7 percent) were acknowledged by writers.

Of the six letters published in the *Australian* which acknowledged identified contributions from that paper's journalists/columnists, four referred to single items (a news article published on June 20-21,²⁵ an editorial on June 25,²⁶ and comment pieces published on April 14²⁷ and May 4²⁸). The only multiple response came in the form of two letters to a column written by political scientist Malcolm Mackerras published on June 20-21.²⁹ So again it can be argued that on the part of readers of the *Australian*, there was little acknowledged response to identified articles or letters. The five articles acknowledged and responded to in the letters to the editor column of the *Australian* amounted to just 2 percent of that newspaper's total on the Metherell affair (243).

The five *DTM* letters which referred specifically to *DTM* articles, identified five individual pieces. The five articles mentioned included three editorials (June 12³⁰ and 25³¹ and August 24³²), one news item (April 16³³) and one column (June 22³⁴). These articles represented 2 percent of total *DTM* articles (256). Letters published in the *AFR* which identified particular *AFR* articles responded to one editorial (June 22³⁵) and one news item (June 24³⁶). The two articles represent 3.2 percent of total *AFR* articles on this issue.

Positive or negative reactions to the media?

Overall, the media received a bad press in letters to the editor. Of the letters to the editor on this issue which mentioned the media, 40 could be classified as negative, 6 as positive and 14 as neutral. A newspaper by newspaper breakdown is provided in Table 8.

There were few bouquets for the media or for journalists generally. *SMH* letter writers focused on a number of aspects of the media's coverage of this issue. One writer reminded fellow readers of the media's coverage of former Labor leader Bill Hayden's appointment as Governor General. He said:

I do not recall the mass media reacting with shock, horror and outrage and being manipulated into creating mass hysteria in the reading public, as we are now subjected to as “this week’s agenda”.³⁷

Table 8: Categorising letters which mention the media

	SMH	DTM	Aust.	AFR	Total
Positive	3	0	2	1	6
Negative	14	11	14	1	40
Neutral	11	0	3	0	14

However not all writers necessarily believed that the media was doing the manipulating. Another *SMH* reader suggested that journalists had in fact been manipulated by Opposition leader Bob Carr. The writer described *SMH* journalists as “kindergarten Marxist[s]” who “continue to pursue every hare” set by the Opposition leader.³⁸ In an appeal to the *SMH*’s then major shareholder, s/he urged: “Please Conrad, introduce some heavyweight journalists who can address issues of public policy with some semblance of balance and equity.”³⁹

This letter provoked a response from another writer who criticised the *SMH* for being “so conservative”.⁴⁰ Two *SMH* letter writers were critical of the media for portraying political leaders in a light that could deter young people from seeking public office.⁴¹ While the first writer referred to the media generally, the second had responded to a particular *SMH* editorial which he said “contained the unfair presumption that all politicians in NSW are potential thieves and robbers, just awaiting the opportunity to rip the public off”.⁴²

The criticisms continued with the release of the ICAC report, with one reader questioning why journalists had not highlighted Temby’s recommendation “that consideration should [not] be given to action to dismiss the Premier or the minister”.⁴³ S/he asked the question: “In their haste to produce headlines, did they not read to the end of the report?”⁴⁴ The same concern was evident in an exchange between P. J. Ashcroft and J. C. Cooke in the letters column of the *SMH*. The

former expressed concern that allegations made at an ICAC hearing were “readily printed and reported with total immunity”.⁴⁵ Responding to Ashcroft, Cooke argued that the former’s comments were illustrative of a “common tendency of commentators to refer to what the report contains without having read it”.⁴⁶ Of *SMH* readers who responded to editorials, one described the article to which he was responding as “one of the silliest and least thoughtful in *Herald* history”,⁴⁷ the second labelled the editorial which prompted him to write as “the ultimate in the journalistic mania for demeaning those in public life”.⁴⁸

Three of the four responses to Gerard Henderson’s article were likewise critical of the author’s arguments.⁴⁹ However Henderson did receive support from one writer, who suggested that the funding currently set aside for the ICAC be redirected to the Sydney Institute, which Henderson headed, so as to “mitigate a good dose of trial by media”.⁵⁰ In a more general sense, there were also plaudits from one reader, who said that she could not “wait to get my next enthralling instalment in the *Herald* each morning”.⁵¹

Perhaps highlighting the competitive nature of the media industry, a number of newspapers ran criticisms of competitors or journalists working for other media organisations. One major focus of such attention was ABC Television’s *7.30 Report* host Quentin Dempster who had been implicated in the affair when Metherell informed the ICAC that he had given his personal diaries to Dempster for safe keeping. Metherell’s diaries became a focus of the ICAC’s inquiry when it was revealed that they were highly scathing of a range of prominent political figures, including Greiner.

Whereas only one *SMH* article had focused on Quentin Dempster’s involvement in the Metherell appointment and resignation, this was the main issue among *Australian* letter writers who commented on the role of the media. Ten letters to the editor published in the *Australian* were critical of Quentin Dempster’s coverage of the appointment or his role therein.⁵² This “flurry” of letters provoked a response from Dempster himself, in the form of a letter to the editor in which he attempted to rebut the criticisms and to lay the blame at the feet of the politicians involved.⁵³

Other *Australian* letters were critical of individual articles by journalists,⁵⁴ of the media's fascination with the money paid to Metherell⁵⁵ and of the media's coverage of the Metherell affair generally. For example, one writer was critical of the media for adopting "double standards".⁵⁶ He said that in its coverage of the Gair affair, the media had regarded as the villain "the person who so cleverly thwarted the purpose of that incident [Queensland premier Joh Bjelke-Petersen] and not the person who made the offer [prime minister Gough Whitlam]".⁵⁷ The writer, Mark Cooray, was even more critical of the media's coverage of, and involvement in, the Metherell appointment, describing it as "unprincipled, malicious, hypocritical and pathologically biased ... a few exceptions apart".⁵⁸ Cooray accused the media of conducting an "unremitting campaign against Greiner" and said that the ALP "would have got nowhere without the support they received from the media".⁵⁹ He said that had a similar appointment been attempted by former Labor premier Neville Wran it would have "died in a few days".⁶⁰ He argued:

If an ALP Premier or Prime Minister were in the same position as Greiner, the majority of journalists would have been providing support and excuses.⁶¹

Cooray's criticisms were not solely directed at the media. He was also critical of the Government for its handling of the issue and of the independents for their actions. Despite its content, Cooray's letter provoked just one response — from Hobbins — who suggested that Greiner's fall was not due to "media vindictiveness" as Cooray had contended, but rather the independents.⁶² Also, there was one letter which applauded an article written by Malcolm Mackerras on this issue and published in the *Australian*.⁶³

Of the letters published in the *DTM*, three were critical of Dempster,⁶⁴ and one was critical of radio commentator Alan Jones.⁶⁵ Four articles criticised the *DTM* for its coverage of the Metherell appointment and aftermath. One was critical of the *DTM* for publishing claims by the Premier's wife that Metherell was a "drama queen" on page 1, the writer arguing: "[h]er opinions mean nothing to me. No-one voted for her so why should she be on the front page."⁶⁶ The second criticised columnist Sue Williams for her portrayal of

Greiner's justifications, arguing: "[h]ow is a man supposed to look when he is accused and convicted by a press that, in most part, hasn't read the Temby report in full?"⁶⁷ A third writer described as "absolutely terrible" the *DTM*'s treatment of Nick Greiner, arguing that any Labor politician in the same position would have acted accordingly.⁶⁸ Finally, the *DTM* was criticised by non-aligned independent Peter Macdonald for its editorial which criticised his role in Greiner's resignation.⁶⁹

Conclusion

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this brief analysis of the Metherell affair. Firstly, the study suggests that readers are interested in such issues — highlighted by the sheer volume of letters published. Secondly, that letter writers are not unwilling to criticise the efforts of journalists and media organisations. In fact, coverage of this issue suggests that readers are more likely to use the letters to the editor columns to take issue with arguments posed by a journalist or media organisation than they will the musings of a fellow correspondent, although even these are not immune from criticism. It also shows that readers are equally critical of editorials as they are of news pieces and columns from non-journalist contributors. However overall, the study shows that readers are more likely to use the letters to the editor columns to participate in the issue than they are to criticise either fellow readers or journalists. Third, the study shows that newspapers are prepared to publish letters that take issue with their own editorial stance or the performance of identified staff journalists and commentators. That is, they appear to see letter to the editor columns as an opportunity for readers to engage or participate in debates.

This study also gives some support for the arguments put forward by Fowler, Davis and Rarich and others that readers who write letters tend to be outspoken and opinionated. (This will be further tested in a separate content analysis of the letters currently being undertaken by the author.)

Finally, the study sheds some light on the competitive relationship between media organisations. It shows that while they are willing to print criticisms of themselves and their own staff, they are equally prepared to publish criticisms of competitors.

Notes

1. According to the Australian Press Council, nearly 5 percent of reader complaints relate to the non-publication or editing of letters. See <<http://www.presscouncil.org.au/pcsite/complaints/stats99.html>>
2. For example, in the mid 1990s the *Australian* published on average 10 percent of the 80 — 110 letters a day it received. See Kellaghan 1995, p.8.
3. N. Pain, Principal Solicitor, Environmental Defender's Office, Sydney; Peter R. Smith, President, Environment Institute of Australia, Sydney. Pain's letter was published in the *SMH* on April 15, 1992, 10. Smith's letter appeared in the *SMH* on April 16, 1992, 12.
4. See J. R. Marsden, President, Law Society of NSW, letter published in the *SMH* on May 13, 1992, 12; and the rejoinder by J. Coombs, QC, President of the NSW Bar Association, on May 14, 1992, 12.
5. K. G. Harrower, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22.
6. R. W. Turner, Secretary, State Bank of NSW, letter published in the *Australian* on July 1, 1992, 16.
7. These included Clover Moore (*DTM*, June 24, 1992, 35); Bob Carr (*Australian*, June 26, 1992, 15; *DTM*, July 10, 1992, 32); Peter Macdonald (*DTM*, August 25, 1992), Senator David Brown (*Australian*, July 1, 1992, 16); Senator Karin Sowada (*Australian*, May 12, 1992, 10); and Stephen Mutch, MLC (*Australian*, May 7, 1992, 10). There was also a letter from former NSW Premier, Barrie Unsworth, the man Greiner defeated to win office in 1988 (*SMH*, June 23, 1992, 16). However Unsworth did not reveal his former political affiliations.
8. G. Nolan, Mayor of North Sydney, letter published in the *SMH*, May 16, 1992, 28.
9. J. Valder, *AFR*, July 2, 1992, 15.

10. J. Sutton, Assistant national secretary, Construction, Forestry, Mining Employees Union, letter published in the *SMH* on May 16, 1992, 28.
11. E. Sydney-Jones, Treasurer of Clover Moore's campaign fund, letter published in the *SMH*, June 30, 1992, 12.
12. In the former category was J. W. Knott (*SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22); and in the latter M. Mackerras (*SMH*, April 16, 1992, 12); and E. Chaples (*SMH*, May 9, 1992, 26). Interestingly, two other academics, H. K. Colebatch (*SMH*, August 25, 1992, 12) and L. J. M. Cooray (*Australian*, June 29, 1992, 8) also had letters published on this issue, but did not identify their professional interests.
13. B. Hobbins, *Australian*, July 3, 1992, 10.
14. L. J. M. Cooray, *Australian*, June 29, 1992, 8.
15. Although the *SMH* does provide readers with some insights into the quantity and tenor of letters through its weekly Postscript column.
16. The only exception was an exchange (mainly one-sided) between Pat Rogers and the presenter of the ABC's *7.30 Report*, Quentin Dempster. Dempster was identified during the ICAC inquiry as a confidant of Metherell's. In fact the inquiry heard that the Metherells had dined at Dempster's house and that Metherell had entrusted a copy of his diaries to Dempster for safekeeping. Dempster said that he had returned the diaries to Metherell when asked to do so and that he did not take the opportunity to read them. Letter writers focused on these facts and also an apparent warning from Dempster to Metherell "Don't trust the Hungarian," which was contained in the diaries. Rogers, who was highly critical of Dempster's role in this affair and his on-air performances, had letters published in the *Australian* on April 27, 8; June 24, 12; and July 13, 8. Dempster ultimately responded to Rogers by way of a letter which was published in the *Australian* on July 8, 14.
17. But note the small number involved.
18. E. Chaples, *SMH*, May 9, 1992, 26; C. Thompson, *SMH*, May 9, 1992, 26; J. R. Marsden, *SMH*, May 13, 1992, 12.
19. K. Taber, *SMH*, June 23, 1992, 16.
20. P. J. Ashcroft, *SMH*, August 6, 1992, 10.
21. K. R. Doyle, *SMH*, August 21, 1992, 8.

22. R. Quilty, *SMH*, April 25, 1992, 24; R. Bryden, *SMH*, May 8, 1992, 12; N. Pilkington, *SMH*, May 13, 1992, 12; G. Johnston, *SMH*, August 6, 1992, 10; R. Hodge, *SMH*, August 25, 1992, 12; M. Mackerras, *SMH*, April 16, 1992, 12; A. Leigh, *SMH*, June 23, 1992, 16; J. Wilson, *SMH*, June 27, 1992, 22.
23. G. Nolan, *SMH*, May 16, 1992, 28.
24. J. W. Knott, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22; M. Lynch, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22; A. F. Parkinson, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22; T. Flew, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22.
25. S. Black, *Australian*, June 20-21, 1992, 14.
26. B. Carr, *Australian*, June 26, 1992, 16.
27. N. R. Churches, *Australian*, April 22, 1992, 10.
28. S. B. Mutch, *Australian*, May 7, 1992, 10.
29. G. W. Roberts, *Australian*, June 23, 1992, 12; A. Burns, *Australian*, June 30, 1992, 12.
30. C. Moore, *DTM*, June 24, 1992, 35.
31. B. Carr, *DTM*, July 10, 1992, 32.
32. P. Macdonald, *DTM*, August 25, 1992, 8.
33. J. Marshall-Orr, *DTM*, April 25, 1992, 17.
34. L. Joyce, *DTM*, June 23, 1992, 26.
35. D. Svenson, *AFR*, June 25, 1992, 17.
36. J. Valder, *AFR*, July 2, 1992, 15.
37. H. Graham, *SMH*, May 1, 1992, 10.
38. P. Murphy, *SMH*, May 20, 1992, 12.
39. *ibid.*
40. This writer actually identified himself as a socialist. See D. Goldstein, *SMH*, May 27, 1992, 14.
41. R. Lusby, *SMH*, May 23, 1992, 24, and K. Doyle, *SMH* August 21, 1992, 8.
42. The editorial was "Ensuring more honest politicians," *SMH*, August 14, 1992, 8. The letter, by Doyle, was published in the *SMH* on August 21, 1992, 8.

43. D. Williams, *SMH*, June 24, 1992, 14.
44. *ibid.*
45. P. J. Ashcroft, "Strong feelings about ICAC's powers," *SMH*, August 6, 1992, 10.
46. J. C. Cooke, *SMH*, August 14, 1992, 10.
47. E. Chaples, *SMH*, May 9, 1992, 26.
48. K. Doyle, *SMH*, August 21, 1992, 8.
49. See J. W. Knott, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22; M. Lynch, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22; and A. F. Parkinson, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22.
50. T. Flew, *SMH*, June 25, 1992, 22.
51. S. Cole, *SMH*, May 15, 1992, 12.
52. P. Rogers, *Australian*, April 27, 1992, 8; M. Q. Brady, "Twists and turns," *Australian*, April 28, 1992, 8; K. Sowada, *Australian*, May 16-17, 1992, 18; J. C. Jenkins, *Australian*, May 22, 1992, 18; B. Eddy, June 23, 1992, 12; P. Rogers, *Australian*, June 24, 1992, 12; S. Black, "Life of a diary," *Australian*, July 6, 1992, 14; H. Bolles, *Australian*, July 13, 1992, 8; P. Rogers, *Australian*, July 13, 1992, 8; M. Bissaker, *Australian*, July 13, 1992, 8.
53. Q. Dempster, "What was on the menu at the Dempster dinner," *Australian*, July 8, 1992, 14.
54. See for example, N. Churches, *Australian*, April 22, 1992, 10.
55. J. F. Fraser, *Australian*, April 25-26, 1992, 16.
56. See J. J. McDermott, *Australian*, June 26, 1992, 15.
57. *ibid.*
58. L. J. M. Cooray, "Greiner's milksops were beaten by bully boys," *Australian*, June 29, 1992, 8.
59. *ibid.*
60. *ibid.*
61. *ibid.*
62. B. Hobbins, *Australian*, July 3, 1992, 10.
63. See G. W. Roberts, *Australian*, June 23, 1992, 12.
64. M. Taylor, *DTM*, May 15, 1992, 28; J-A. Simone, *DTM*, May 15, 1992, 28; G. Storrier, *DTM*, June 23, 1992, 26. Dempster was accused of biased reporting (Taylor); and racism (Simone). The latter suggested that he be

sacked and his “never trust a Hungarian” statement be investigated by race relations authorities. Storrier called for an inquiry into Dempster’s dinner party which was attended by Metherell and an ICAC employee, Nigel Powell.

65. J. Heddle, “Critic under fire over ICAC ruling,” *DTM*, June 25, 1992, 36. Heddle argued that Jones had selectively used sections of the ICAC report to back-up his on-air criticisms of Temby and his findings.
66. R. Stewart, *DTM*, May 15, 1992, 28.
67. L. Joyce, *DTM*, June 23, 1992, 26.
68. Mrs Sharri, *DTM*, June 24, 1992, 35.
69. P. Macdonald, *DTM*, August 25, 1992, 8.

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Corporations and collectives: an overview of Australian newspaper companies 1860-1920

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The intention of this article is to provide an Australia-wide overview of the processes of capitalisation and company formation which overtook the newspaper press from the second half of the nineteenth-century. This analysis constitutes the preliminary phase of a larger media history which needs to be written about the corporate successes and failures of the industry Australia-wide. While the main focus of the paper remains the popular press, it will be argued that an understanding of newspaper company history sheds light on a multiplicity of Australian media traditions not only popular papers but also on their more reputable city counterparts; not only on regional media, where company formation if uneven, was surprisingly rapid and significant, but equally as a valuable marker of labour and radical aspirations in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the latter constituting an alternative tradition or narrative to the relentless takeovers and mergers of the corporate tradition.

While this brief and selective overview, focusing on the lower end of the newspaper market, cannot do full justice to the voluminous source material consulted, it does provide a useful comparative perspective across the colonies. For the purposes of the survey, approximately 150 archival files were consulted. The sheer quantity of these records, comprising mostly shareholding lists and registration documents, points to a significant and possibly systematic neglect in Australian media history. Systematic in so far as

their existence appears to challenge accepted versions of the past — most notably those of liberal individualism, be it that of the enterprising proprietor or of the journalist-editor who cherished independence and editorial control. That newspaper companies were significant as early as the 1860s is demonstrable even in Queensland, the so-called haven of the small press proprietor, where both metropolitan dailies including the forerunner of the *Courier-Mail* were established as companies within a decade of separation from New South Wales. The unhappy fortunes of these companies, documented in my *Press in Colonial Queensland* (Cryle 1989), suggest that shareholders and directors, no matter how fiercely independent, were nevertheless constrained in these new company operations and arrangements. Detailed Queensland research (Kirkpatrick 1984; Manion 1982: 107-174) provides strong evidence of regional company formation in the nineteenth-century. Of the 35 Queensland companies included in this survey, 20 were regional enterprises. Elsewhere in Victoria and in Western Australia, the ratio of regional to metropolitan companies was about even (1:1) unlike New South Wales, and South Australia which remained more centralised. The economics of regional company formation in the former colonies during the 1880s and 1890s are bound up with the new climate of mining investment, some of which also precipitated metropolitan newspaper company formation. Whatever the outcome of this activity, there is a need to understand the broad economic forces which brought about the proliferation of media companies at regional and national levels.

If company formation and organisation brought constraints as well as opportunities, it complicated the work of editors who now had to negotiate with their boards of management. That journalists were also beginning to see their papers as an investment is confirmed by the regularity with which they appear in the shareholding lists of newspaper enterprises. Any understanding of company ownership and investment helps to fill a significant gap in recent accounts by Julianne Schultz (1998), Jenny Craik (1995) and others about the historic tensions between the media as public forum on one hand, and as a private investment in the other. Although they were rarely appointed as company directors, journalists were lured to particular papers by

the offer of shares and could even be disciplined by the threat of having shares withdrawn. At the same time, journalists and newspaper workers used company structures to reassert their independence through the formation of cooperatives in an effort to improve their conditions or to advance political causes. The history of company ownership, it is argued for the period to 1930, concerns not only the individual urge to become a shareholder but also the struggle of collectives and union organisations Australia-wide. To this extent, studying newspaper company history involves more than endorsing dominant corporate traditions; it permits a recognition of other voices — labour, ethnic and radical — which organised their limited resources against the prevailing social and economic system.

The Telegraph companies and metropolitan investment

An overview of the scale and pattern of nineteenth-century company development can be gleaned by examining Australian enterprises founded in the wake of the London *Telegraph* in 1855. The success story of the period, surpassing the *Times* within five years (Riffenburgh 1993: 45) the *Telegraph* brand name was the signal not only for a change in the style of journalism but an attractive model for new-found commercialism. Because of its origin, essentially British and imperial, the company traditions associated with the *Telegraph* have been neglected in Australian media history. Moreover they do not sit easily with traditions of individualism and liberalism which dominate our press historiography. While the transplantation of the *Telegraph* model was relatively protracted, it did produce a number of stable namesakes, the Sydney and Brisbane companies being the most enduring. One local complication was that colonial imitators had to compete with their established London mentor. Moreover, colonial success depended on specific local conditions before metropolitan investment in popular penny papers became attractive.

The Telegraph companies across the colonies though never syndicated or connected from a business viewpoint, provide a useful comparative basis for this Australia-wide company survey. The earliest

Telegraph titles in the Australian colonies — the 3d *Tasmanian Telegraph* (1858-59), the *Albury Telegraph* (1858) and Sinnett's 2d Adelaide publication (1862) were established too early to benefit from new company legislation which provided city investors with limited liability on their paid-up capital. However, by 1866, Thomas Elder and other Adelaide investors had formed a *Daily Telegraph* and *Weekly Mail* Newspaper Company with registered capital of £3000 (14 Feb., 1866, SA Archives GRS 513/2 20/66). Brisbane and Melbourne Telegraph companies, established at the same period, were also daily enterprises requiring substantial capital support. Both registered as Joint Stock companies, the Brisbane company with £5000, the Melbourne concern with nominal capital of £10,000 (7 Nov., 1872, QSA A/21310 and 4 Feb, 1869, VPRS 932/143). However, because of the limited liability provisions, the working capital of these companies remained considerably lower at around £2000. Calls on shares initially were much lower (20 percent) than the full amount, while the total shares available were not always taken up, in part because the companies were formed at a time when the gold and mining economy had slowed and investors were relatively cautious. Most of the initial investment went towards purchasing the plant and office equipment. Within five years of operation, the Melbourne paper had established itself with assets of £6092 and liabilities of £3162.

In comparison with their London namesake, the first wave of *Telegraph* companies in Australia enjoyed modest success and remained commercially conservative. They continued to rely on the subscription system as their main method of selling and did not depart significantly from their morning competitors in matters of typography and layout. In the case of the Brisbane and Melbourne companies, there were nevertheless significant differences in the shareholding patterns and in the social composition of investors. While the Brisbane shares were as low as £1 each, Melbourne *Telegraph* shares were prohibitive at £500 each. Consequently, the Brisbane company began with a large number of small investors, predominantly tradespeople, and exhibited a higher shareholder turnover than the Melbourne company which was the preserve of a stable and privileged group, including several "gentlemen", an accountant, journalist Harold Willoughby and Charles

Frederick Somarton as manager-printer. Yet, within five years of existence, the differences between the two companies diminished as a small core of shareholders secured control over the Brisbane enterprise. After 10 years of operation, ownership had passed to a trio of conservative Brisbane professionals with Upper House connections, rather than Lower House or liberal and *Courier* sympathies. In Queensland, as in Victoria and South Australia, company formation provided social and political conservatives with an acceptable degree of anonymity and covert influence over metropolitan public opinion.

If company and commercial activity remained unspectacular in the 1860s and 1870s, the 1880s brought a second wave of investment, which signalled the prosperity of the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* in particular. As the city's first penny daily the *Telegraph* entered into direct competition with the *Herald* by promising to place "reliable morning news" in the hand of tram and train travellers (Annual Report, Feb. 1885 ML). Elsewhere, including Brisbane, most *Telegraph* companies were evening publications. In spite of this, the Sydney *Telegraph* company performed best, recording a net profit of £5597 in 1889, and throughout the depressed nineties, paid dividends of 12.5 percent in 1892 (Annual Reports 1890-1893). In common with the first Melbourne company, the Sydney *Telegraph* included a journalist as shareholder. Walter Wynne of King Street took out a £1000 shareholding, presumably in his own enterprise. In such cases, journalists were no longer self-employed individuals but had become part of an exclusive and small group of investors. However they were not usually appointed as company directors. In one instance, the new Melbourne *Telegraph* company, established in 1884 with 100 £500 shares, journalist-shareholder James McKinley was appointed company manager (30 Aug. 1883 VPRS 932/785) along the lines of Charles Hardie Buzacott in the Brisbane *Courier* company. Unlike the Sydney *Telegraph*, a Melbourne company which depended on local merchants foundered during the 1890s depression and the *Herald* emerged as the main popular competitor of the *Argus* and the *Age*. A measure of the respectability of newspaper investment by 1890 was the involvement of clergy like William Henry Fitchett and F.W. Brentnall in the Melbourne and Brisbane companies respectively; both were influential and outspoken conservatives in their communities. Increasingly, as they grew in size and complexity,

newspaper companies reflected less and less the lower middle class interests which constituted their readership.

For metropolitan companies, it was not until the early years of the twentieth-century that profits became lucrative. The *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, leading the field, recorded a rise from £11,000 in 1896 to as much as £44,000 profit within 10 years (Annual Reports, 1897-1907). While telegraphic news was a growing necessity and expense — the Sydney paper prided itself on sending the first report of the German annexation of New Guinea to Europe — its heaviest running costs remained machinery and paper, the latter a scarce and expensive resource even before World War One. In comparison with Sydney, sister companies elsewhere remained modest. The *Daily Telegraph* circulating north from Perth postwar, was a much more modest concern (£2000) with a very small profit margin (£30). (1922 WA. Archives AN913/6 S41/18). While the Launceston *Daily Telegraph* established in the mid-1880s was more prosperous, its shareholdings remained concentrated in the hands of two or three investors, most notably the family of printer William Whittaker (ISA 5C323 no. 385). Although other Telegraph companies diversified considerably postwar, they never approached the scale of the Sydney Telegraph which attracted 100-150 shareholders in all capital cities as well as New Zealand and England. Edited by Henry Gullett MLC, the Sydney company alone could claim a commercial success in the southern hemisphere comparable with its great London namesake.

With the notable exception of the Sydney daily, the Telegraph companies operated from a pre-eminently local capital base and without the pretensions of their British counterpart. As such, they may be seen as constituting an Australian media and corporate tradition, less concerned with imperialising at home and abroad than with colonial (state) politics and society. Although they embraced speed and technology in their title, they lacked the resources to outshine their metropolitan competitors in the field of telegraphic reports or indeed of editorialising. They did however change the nature of metropolitan journalism by providing a miscellany of reading material, much of it from Britain, without engaging in the publicity stunts or excesses of their British and American commercial press. In so far as they

contributed to Australian media traditions, such companies were among the first to achieve a lower middle class following without striving to educate or politicise their new readers.

Cooperative and labour newspaper companies

In most companies discussed thus far, printers and journalists appear as individual shareholders on lists dominated by merchants and representatives of the urban middle class. In a number of specific instances, however, investment by newspaper workers was more concerted, constituting a collective with industrial and political objectives. One such case was the *Evening Mail* of 1869, owned by 10 Ballarat compositors (3 April, 1869, VPRS 932/48), while a later enterprise the Newcastle Cooperative Newspaper Company was begun by local compositors and journalists (NSW AO 3/5733 1707). Although investment was modest (£4-5000), these were viable concerns in regional centres where typographical societies were active from the mid nineteenth-century and where compositors comprised the largest single category of newspaper worker. If as Hagan (1966: 131-132) states, compositors continued to exercise the prerogative of industrial action on metropolitan papers including the *Telegraph* companies, they were sufficiently well remunerated elsewhere to pool their financial resources and form their own companies. One likely objective of the Ballarat enterprise was to maintain high wage levels after the general economic downturn which followed the gold rushes. Of the £837 profit it recorded in 1869 (19 July), the *Evening Mail* company dispensed £534 in wages, presumably to its shareholders-employees. In this instance, the newspaper company was the upshot of collective and labour action. Hagan (1966: 41-42), in his study of printing unions, confirms the tenacity of the Ballarat Typographical Society at this time and its ambitious attempts to organise a Victorian Typographical Union as early as the 1860s.

From its inception, company legislation was viewed by organising workers and unions as an opportunity for collective empowerment rather than simply as a source of individual profit. To this extent company history is bound up with a second media tradition based

upon labour or “the business of labour” as much as on capital alone. In South Australia, as early as 1878, the *Labour Advocate* registered as a newspaper company (S.A. Archives GRS 513/3. 14/77). In Queensland, a decade later, the *Boomerang* also operated as a company (21 June, 1889, QSA A/18940 186/5). As the 1890s grew more turbulent, a People’s Newspaper group was organised by Albert Hinchciffe in Central Queensland to support the cause of labour and the striking shearers. Unlike the early cooperative companies at Ballarat and Newcastle, its membership was drawn predominantly from the working classes of Rockhampton, Mount Morgan and Peak Downs — labourers, shearers and miners, whose wages and capital were more limited than compositors or journalists. After two years, the People’s Newspaper had 466 shareholders on its list, most of whom purchased 2-5 five shilling shares, but if a newspaper ever appeared, no files appear to have survived (1894 QSA Company Register A/21336). The cycle of depression and militancy which spawned such companies differed from more orthodox investment patterns, notably the buoyant 1880s when confidence was high and capital more readily available. Consequently, one of the features of the labour companies, apart from their working class involvement, was their instability. While regional newspaper companies continued for a decade or more and the *Telegraph* companies for longer, the time-span of the cooperative and labour companies tended to be much shorter, ranging between five and one or two years only. Importantly, too, as Toohill notes (1993: 69), moves towards industrial unionism had the potential to erode the craft ethos which inspired the early cooperatives.

A strategic consideration for union and labour organisations when establishing joint stock companies under adverse conditions was to remain attractive to advertisers and middle-class investors. Arguably, these commercial considerations influenced the short-lived People’s Newspaper Publishing Company founded in Perth in 1891 on a platform of political and constitutional reform. Rather than embracing class-based and industrial labour policies, the Perth company in question espoused “the advancement of freedom of opinion and true liberalism” (1891 WA. Archives AN193/6 2003’s. A decade later the Melbourne People’s Publishing Company, in its manifesto, attacked

the Argus and the Age for opposing reform, proclaiming as its central objective, the establishment of “a truly liberal Democratic Penny Newspaper to aid Australian Democratic aspirations” (Prospectus 14 Sept, 1903: 2 VPRS 932/3781). The Adelaide *Daily Herald* too promoted itself as “the best medium to reach the working and middle classes of the community” (24 Oct, 1917, MSS, Mortlock Library). The moderate politics of the Melbourne company, a cooperative experiment, were dictated as much by a craft-union outlook as by would-be investors. Under this arrangement, the 50 printers and journalists who registered the company were paid from the proceeds of sales, estimated at 10,000 for 4d a copy, while subscribed capital in £1 shares was used to pay the costs of the printing plant and production (Prospectus, 14 Sept. 1903: 1). After four years of operation, £100 had been raised in shares with liability on shares amounting to £185. Even after the company was wound up by petition, the reluctance of shareholders to pay the minimum investment of 5/- per share delayed its termination.

While constrained to weigh their democratic aspirations against the need for middle-class investment, cooperative and labour companies undertook specific measures to prevent what they mistrusted in their commercial rivals — namely, a tendency towards oligopoly in the hands of a few wealthy shareholders. Consequently, there were calls for restrictions to be placed on the maximum number of shares than any one investor could purchase. The *People's Daily* in Melbourne refused to pay its directors special commissions or premiums and limited its shareholders to one vote, irrespective of the number of shares they held. Wary of individual gain which it denounced as “the root curse of honest journalism” (Prospectus: 2), the same company sought to attract a large number of shareholders rather than a few wealthy participants. An additional feature of these companies by the twentieth-century was the presence of women as shareholders. Prior to this, women appear exceptionally with nominal holdings as wives of directors or as family members. In the newer labour companies, however, women, despite reduced purchasing power were encouraged to participate as union members, although there were no instances of women holding directorships. On the *People's Daily* lists, women

represented approximately one in 10 of the shareholders. While a pattern of family involvement was still evident, women were also investing on an individual basis.

The labour companies of the early twentieth-century were as ambitious as they were risky. This is especially true of the daily labour papers which appeared in most Australian capital cities before the first World War. A British estimate of the capital required for a daily press operation was as much as £70,000 yet the *Daily Herald*, when founded in Adelaide in 1910, struggled to attract one-quarter of this amount (2 May, 1913, MSS, Mortlock Library). The detailed records of the Adelaide Herald confirm that it faced a constant struggle to remain solvent in a market where its competitors, the Register and Advertiser, were well established, wages were high and paper costs rising. Nevertheless at the outbreak of war, the company achieved an annual turnover of £18,000 with advertising revenue consistently exceeding that for sales (Statement of Expenditure to 30 Sept. 1914). The other significant source of income for labour papers was job printing from the unions. On the expenditure side, wages swallowed advertising income, while cables and telegrams accounted for the printing and jobbing revenue. As the war continued and industrial unrest grew, sales of the *Herald* remained static but shareholder loyalty provided some relief. Under a system of monthly instalments, unpaid capital on shares fell to 15 percent and working capital reached £20,000 by March 1917. On the business side, the company's achievement lay in resuscitating its advertising revenue after a boycott in 1916. However the high wages of the advertising agents it hired (twice that of an editor) prevented it from pursuing this approach more aggressively in the long term.

As early as 1912 when the *Daily Herald* launched an appeal to shareholders to double their holdings, an initiative was launched to disseminate the publication all over Australia by advocating supporters buy six copies of the Christmas edition for personal distribution (Christmas number and Order form, 1912). Subsequently, changes in style and format including the insertion of a women's page proved more effective. George Burgogne, the new editor responsible for these changes, had voiced his immediate concern to the Directors that

the *Herald* was “preaching to the already converted” and printing “nothing but politics and dull trade union reports” (*Bulletin* 27 Oct, 1954). Unlike the cooperative associations and Typographical Unions, the People’s Printing and Publishing Companies were less influenced by industry workers or journalists. Burgogne was overruled on business matters, most importantly on the critical decision to enter the morning market in competition with two established dailies. In retrospect, the Board’s determination to proceed against the advice of staff was seen as madness since there existed “virtually a clear field for an evening paper”. Such was the lot of many editors and journalists working under company control. Reviewing the *Herald* venture as the first metropolitan labour daily in Australia, Burgogne attributed its failure to a combination of undercapitalisation and managerial error by “certain ambitious persons” who “would have their way”. At the same time, there were significant journalistic achievements. Among these, staff listed the paper’s assistance to the party during the successful 1920 election campaign. Despite the weight of its morning opposition, the *Daily Herald* also broke stories ahead of its rivals — the death of Edward VII, the Jeffries-Johnson fight and a Japanese earthquake, in part due to its association with the independent Pacific Cable.

The economic wisdom of remaining in a weekly market was well demonstrated in the case of a labour contemporary, the *Westralian Worker* a Perth company established by parliamentarians and unions in the first decade of the century. As a weekly, the *Westralian Worker* enjoyed significant advantages over its popular rival, Norton’s *Truth*, selling at half the price (6/6d) for twice the reading matter (pamphlet, Battye Library). With confidence at a peak, a daily publication was planned in 1910 and a prospectus issued for 50,000 £1 shares. Fundamental to the daily publication strategy was the requirement that all unionists be “prepared to take out at least one share each” (Report to Fremantle Congress, 1 July 1913). By the outbreak of war, 16,000 £1 shares had been taken out, mostly by unionists, but this fell far short of the £57,000 estimated as the requirement for a daily. Further union support came in the form of job printing contracts as well as the running of bazaars and ‘carnivals’ by the women’s labour organisations. While income from these sources was clearly limited, it

would be simplistic to assume the People's Printing and Publishing companies existed purely for the sale of their shareholders. A notable feature of their operations which distinguished them from the middle-class or Telegraph companies was their free distribution. In the case of the West Australian People's company, free delivery to hospitals, kindred institutions, reading rooms and immigrant boats was estimated to have been as high as 50,000 copies in 1915.

Conclusion

Such were the social and political objectives of these companies that profits may not be the only measure of evaluating their operations. To turn any kind of profit, usually in the hundreds rather than the thousands of pounds, was deemed acceptable for their purposes. In comparing and contrasting the extensive company records which form the basis of this study, it is interesting that while the files of the *Telegraph* companies are relatively brief~ confined to shareholding lists and registration for the most part, the records of individual People's Printing and Publishing companies in particular are more detailed and voluminous, an indication of their struggle and ingenuity under more difficult conditions. Judged on purely commercial guidelines, newspaper companies in the "business of labour" appear ill-conceived and undercapitalised, as some undoubtedly were by 1920. Yet their collective achievement remain impressive. The Sydney unions, for example, were able to raise £126,000 for the establishment of an evening daily prior to the war. The search for interstate readers and nationally-based investment continued in 1921 with the establishment of Labour Papers Limited in defiance of the historical tradition of local capital investment under company legislation. In conclusion, to study Australian newspaper companies during this period is to engage with neglected traditions, not simply a Whiggish narrative of middle-class metropolitan investment embodied in the *Telegraphs* but also with an alternative media tradition which sought under different economic circumstances to use the structures of capital and investment markets for collective and reformist ends.

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The provincial press and politics: NSW, 1841-1930

Rod Kirkpatrick

Politics and its various forms of expression spelt survival and, indeed, sustenance, for some provincial newspapers in colonial times. This paper sets out to examine how the New South Wales provincial press of the nineteenth century and early twentieth interacted with and impacted upon the political movements and processes of the day. Comparison will be drawn between the NSW provincial press and the frontier press of the United States and also the early provincial press of New Zealand. Some of the major issues on which the NSW papers sought to lead public opinion are examined. The editors and papers that were more overtly “political” than others are discussed, as are the less overtly “political” roles adopted by the papers — such as advancing the local district materially — because they, too, impacted on the political process.

For a newspaper, survival takes precedence over principles and philosophy. At different times and in different places, however, politics and its various forms of expression have spelt survival for a newspaper. This was true of England during the eighteenth century when governments subsidised “sympathetic” newspapers to the tune of £500 or £600 a year (Williams 1969, pp.7-8). It was true in America where editors were central figures in the party organisations in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. In Australia, despite their avowals of being “sworn to no master” — political or religious — many pioneering provincial newspapers were often explicitly or implicitly linked with political movements or political figures or they were owned and staffed by those motivated by enthusiasms that were “political” to some degree or another. Comparisons will be drawn with frontier papers in the United States and the pioneering provincial press of New Zealand to measure the “political” nature of the NSW

press. The principal aim of this paper is to explore the dimensions of the interaction between politics and the provincial press in the colony of New South Wales (NSW) before federation.

The American experience

In any consideration of the relationship between politics and the pioneering Australian provincial newspapers, the American experience is instructive, even though American journalism historians speak with differing voices when they discuss the political independence or partisanship of their pioneering frontier newspapers. For instance, William E. Huntzicker found “apparent contradictions” between the conclusions of Oliver Knight and William H. Lyon on whether pioneering editors were “rugged individualists or corporate and political spokesmen”. Carolyn Stewart Dyer (1989, pp.1-3) found that party politics and political patronage were the primary currencies of exchange that made the newspaper possible in new Wisconsin communities of a few hundred or thousand settlers. The press system in Wisconsin before the Civil War was a political system. All but about 10 percent of the newspapers operating between 1833 and 1860 were at one time or another identified as organs of the Democrats, Whigs, Republicans, Free-Soilers, Abolitionists, or other political parties. In both the 1850 and 1860 censuses, only about five percent of the newspapers were characterised as independent or neutral in politics. By contrast, Barbara Cloud (1980, pp.54-55, pp.72-73), in a study of Washington Territory, found that newspapers started expressly for partisan purposes were *never* the first newspapers in their particular communities. Of the 91 newspapers established in Washington Territory during 1852-1882, 20 (22 percent) owed their beginnings directly to partisan political concerns. All of these were the second or subsequent newspapers in their communities. In each of these towns this pattern developed: non-partisan first newspaper, emerging partisanship, competing partisan newspaper(s).

Lyon (1965) also found in his study of Missouri newspapers that the real pioneer editors — the first in each community — started non-partisan publications. In Ohio, the first newspaper, the *Centinel of the Northwestern Territory* (1793), announced its political impartiality by

adopting the motto, “Open to all parties, but influenced by none”. The papers that followed it, however, were drawn into the contest between the Federalists and the Democrat-Republicans over statehood and other issues (Hooper 1933, p.4). In Arizona, Lyon (1994, p.3) found that politics was the great generative force of frontier newspapers. Politically motivated, the pioneer editor laboured in an intensely competitive atmosphere. Parties, factions, and individual candidates for office saw editorial support as a must for success at the polls, resulting in a plethora of newspapers, more politically charged than today. Gerald Baldasty (1984, p.11) says American political parties saw the press as a vehicle to inform, propagandise, and exhort voters. The single most important link between party and electorate was the partisan newspaper. Central to the process of party organisation in the 1820s and early 1830s were the partisan editor and the partisan newspaper. Editors frequently were part of the central committee that ran the party or were closely tied to the committee. In turn, newspapers served as the major vehicle for communicating with and, ideally, mobilising voters (Baldasty 1984, p.5).

The New Zealand experience

In New Zealand, partisan political advocacy in newspapers was normal in the 1840s and 1850s, which Patrick Day (1990, pp.107-108) calls the “early provincial period”. The practice had developed before self-government was granted in 1852 and had intensified in the final years before the first elections were held. Intense political agitation was coordinated through the colony’s newspapers as self-government was sought. This agitation, says Day, became “partisan political advocacy on behalf of particular politicians” and was seldom conducted according to standards of decorum or fair play. Most of the major elected officials had connections with NZ newspapers; these connections varied from actual ownership to a period of intermittent contributions to a newspaper. Day says: “Press political advocacy was not usually advocacy for a political party — these were as yet generally undeveloped — but personal advocacy for a particular politician.” Mostly the politician also happened to own the newspaper. In Great Britain, the partisan nature of newspapers in the 1870s was suggested

by a report that of all the papers published there, 498 were classed as Liberal, 276 as Conservative, 68 as Liberal-Conservative, while 912 advocated “measures, not men” — they were, politically speaking, of no party (*Sydney Mail* 1876, p.171).

The Australian experience

In Australia, political partisanship was never so clearly defined in the nineteenth century as it was in the United States. In addition, the lack of a presidential style of government provided significant electoral contrasts with America. The partisan editor and the partisan newspaper, as known in the US in the 1820s and 1830s, were not features of Australian newspapers. The editors were not vital links in a party’s organisational chain, even though some were actively involved in politics, openly or behind the scenes. Before 1855, the growing demand in the Australian colonies for self-government divided people into two clear groups, both with their peculiar approach to what was required in the constitution of each colony.

[T]wo broad political movements, conservative and liberal, existed in the colony, reflecting significant differences in approach to its government and its social and economic development, and providing therefore a potential ideological basis for party action. By 1856 “conservative” and “liberal” were not merely *ad hoc* labels applied loosely by contemporaries anxious to find a way of describing trends apparent at the elections. They were, rather, appropriate and accepted names for particular attitudes of mind — perhaps traditions — which reached back into the forties and which crystallised most sharply around the constitutional matters under debate in the fifties. (Loveday & Martin 1966, pp.9-10)

These two groups remained after the British Imperial Parliament granted self-government to the colonies in 1855. The conservatives were associated with the landed gentry who saw themselves in the role of a colonial aristocracy (Loveday & Martin 1966, pp.10-17). The liberals were mainly engaged in commercial, professional and agricultural (as opposed to pastoral) pursuits. As a rising mercantile and professional class, they strongly opposed the formation of a colonial aristocracy, and the convict system that provided the free labour that allowed the pastoralists to maintain and work their large properties.

Through their efforts transportation of convicts to Australia was brought to an end in 1840. The liberals' main platform consisted of stable government, the development of the colony and the virtues of free trade. They strenuously opposed the formation of an appointed Upper House and pledged themselves to its abolition. They argued that stable government could be achieved only by reforming the electoral act; they linked to this a demand for land legislation that would put an end to the power of the pastoralists. They called for a state educational system, increased internal and external communications, municipal institutions, an extended system of courts, and a reorganisation of the administration (Loveday & Martin 1966, pp.17-23).

In country towns, if the newspaper that was being established was the only one in the town, the paper would generally declare its neutrality, but lean towards the liberals, or it would declare its support at the outset for the liberals. The *Newcastle Chronicle* (established in 1858) claimed to be liberal in politics (*Maitland Mercury* 1859). "Its leaders reflected the major political issues of the day and read like a manifesto of liberal principles (Moody 1969)." The *Armidale Express* (1856) promoted the "liberal interest" in the first general election after the achievement of responsible government. Although the candidate whom it supported was not returned, its political influence was thought to be so considerable that two years later a prospective candidate for Parliament offered one of the proprietors £1,000 if he would publish another journal in his support. The *Yass Courier* and the *Mudgee Newspaper* (both 1857) were launched in the liberal interest. One newspaper editor commented that if NSW did not "become a liberal-minded nation, the fault certainly will not rest with the press" (*Northern Times* 1857).

In a study of colonial Victorian newspapers, Elizabeth Morrison (1991, p.139) found that newspapers in small towns tended to take a consensual approach to controversial matters — including, no doubt, partisanship. The *St Arnaud Mercury* observed, on 4 February 1865, at the end of its first year, that "the fight in journalistic literature is inevitably uphill" and declared that its "only study will be, as it ever has been, the public good, and the advancement of our district to that position in the

social scale which its wealth and undeveloped resources entitle it to". The *Coleraine Albion* intended at the outset on 4 January 1868 to "give the great questions of Colonial politics a wide berth". By contrast, taking a political stand was especially noticeable in newspapers in multiple-newspapercentres such as Geelong, Ballarat and Sandhurst. New papers claimed to provide views that were alternative to and more liberal than those of the long-established dailies, which were seen as ultra-conservative. In NSW, political motivations generally arose somewhere in relation to the establishment of a provincial newspaper — if not for the town's first, as at Armidale in 1856 and Grafton in 1859, then certainly for its second (O'Keefe, pp.89-104; *Grafton Argus* 1874). H.M. Franklyn captured this in describing a typical town's growth up to 1880, with the remark that "two newspapers have been struggling into existence, and are advocating diametrically opposite views in politics" (Cannon 1973, p.239). At Grafton, William Edward Vincent launched the *Clarence and Richmond Examiner* in 1859, but holding the reins was wealthy politician, Clark Irving, whose objective was re-election at the impending NSW poll and achievement of separation for the northern districts of NSW (Vincent 1980, p.18). Vincent promised to support the liberal principles that would be evolved in the "New Parliament" (*Clarence & Richmond Examiner* 1859, p.2). In Sydney, Irving and Dr John Dunmore Lang failed to gain Parliament's support for the separation of the Northern Rivers district from the colony of NSW. Later, Vincent's failure to provide enthusiastic support for the Irving/Lang stance led Irving, as the major stakeholder, to decide to sell the *Examiner* title and plant to Richard Stevenson on 31 March 1861 (*Clarence & Richmond Examiner* 1861a & 1861b). Vincent was not the first, and would not be the last, editor expected to play the political tune required by his proprietorial master.

Papers fell into two groups

In at least one sense, Australian provincial newspapers drew from the British experience where, from about 1726 onwards, the provincial newspapers fell into two broad groups: (1) the papers which flung themselves wholeheartedly into the political fray; and (2) those which avoided the outspoken political essay and strove to steer a middle course between the two parties (Cranfield 1962, p.124). Among the

latter in NSW were such papers as the *Grafton Argus* (established 1874), the *Durham Chronicle*, Dungog (1888), and the *Uralla and Walcha Times* (1876), which declared that they were sworn to no political master. Many such declarations were soon found to be shallow, for the papers would soon be openly supporting one side of politics or the other. In October 1858 when the *Wagga Wagga Express* was about to begin, a contemporary noted that it “*promises to be of Liberal politics; but from circumstances that have come to our knowledge we have reason to believe that it will ultimately become an organ to the squatters*” (*Yass Courier* 1858). The *Uralla News*, established in 1904, was independent at first, but two years later supported Labor and won the local Labor branch’s total printing order. It rejected non-Labor advertisements (Harman 1975, pp.229-230).

In A.T. Shakespeare’s view, the establishment of country newspapers in the nineteenth century was based “as much on differences in editorial policies as on commercial competition”. G.H. Mott noted this when editorialising in his *Border Post* (1860) at Albury:

Party feeling usually runs pretty high in small communities, and if it so happens that any considerable section of such a community are disappointed with the result of an election, or are dissatisfied with the management of the local press, the first thing done is to start a newspaper to represent their particular views.

At Armidale, the squatters had become convinced they could not win the local seat without the support of a newspaper and so they invited Frank Newton to establish the *Armidale Telegraph* in their interests (O’Keefe, p.94). At Narrandera, the *Ensign* was established in November 1886 to speak for “labour and reform” — and, no doubt, protectionism — to counterbalance the *Argus* which had been preaching “commerce and conservatism” — and, no doubt, free trade — since its establishment in January 1880 (Gammage 1986, p.139; *Pastoral Times* 1880). Some papers declared that they would avoid partisanship. The *Molong Argus* (1907), when it gained a new proprietor, Frank Hartley, in 1907, declared that it was “the duty of a newspaper to faithfully and correctly report the political speeches of those who seek the suffrages of the electors, and to bind itself to principles rather

than to individuals or parties". Hartley was going to express his opinion on political matters freely and strongly "irrespective of whether our doing so pleases or displeases individuals or parties".

Major issues

From their earliest days, provincial newspapers sought to influence public opinion on specific issues. After the gold discoveries of the mid-nineteenth century, rival newspapers were established in many towns to represent the contending interests of squatters and selectors in the land controversy. Examples have been provided in Armidale, Mudgee and Deniliquin. In addition, the *Free Selector*, with editorials written in the first person singular by Hanley Bennett, was established in Tamworth at the end of 1874 and in southern NSW the *Yass Free Holders' and Free Selectors' Advocate* was issued monthly from November 1875 from the office of the *Yass Courier*. (Tamworth Historical Society; *Australian Almanac* 1876, p.89; *Singleton Argus* 1875). The *Albury Banner and Wodonga Express*, a weekly bordertown newspaper for ninety years from 1860, became known as "The Cocky's Bible" because George Adams, who bought it in 1862, advocated the cause of the free selectors so forcefully (Walker 1976, p.170). At Wagga Wagga, the squatter-initiated *Express* (1858) did little to disguise its elitism at the outset, even though it was the first newspaper in the town.

Demagogues may preach doctrines which they know to be heterodoxical — political charlatans may pander to the weak vanity of the multitude by telling them that the man without a shoe to his foot or a sixpence in his pocket is as valuable and important a member of the social community as the one who by his skill, care and perseverance has amassed wealth or even independence for his family and himself — but truth and the experience of everyday life teach us the contrary. The larger the stake which any one has risked on the welfare or otherwise of a country, the more faithful and more strenuous will be his exertions on its behalf.

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, when free trade versus protection became an acute political issue, there was a new editorial basis for newspaper rivalry although the opponents seem to have been much the same as in the squatter-versus-selector debates. The *National Advocate* was established as a daily in Bathurst in 1889

expressly to fight the protectionist cause in a town where free-trade supporters received a generous hearing in the daily *Times* and the tri-weekly *Free Press*. By March 1890, the *Advocate* was claiming a circulation more than double that of either of its two principal competitors, both dailies by then (Kirkpatrick 1996, pp.60-61; *National Advocate* 1889a, 1889b & 1890). At Taree, where the long-established *Manning Times* espoused free trade, an alderman, George Saxby, initiated the bi-weekly *Manning River Independent and Advocate of Native Industries* in 1888 to support protection (*Sydney Mail* 1889, p.672; *Wingham Chronicle* 1888, p.2). At Molong the *Argus* — whose editorial motto was “Australia for the Australians” — was set up on 6 September, 1895, to pursue the protectionist cause against the free-trade *Express*. At the end of its first year the *Argus* (1895 & 1896) had gained “a foothold that will defy the united efforts of the foreign trade adherents and local boycotters to dislodge”. Each week it was gaining new subscribers. At the close of its second year, the *Argus* remarked that it had encountered until then “a senseless opposition from a few” who sought its downfall. Protectionists were surely as entitled as free-traders to have their opinions respected, and to have press representation (*Molong Argus* 1897). At Tamworth, the fiercely free-trade *Observer* was outraged in 1887 when a local MLA, R.H. (Harry) Leven, proclaimed himself determinedly protectionist. Its attacks opened up old sores of rivalry with the *Tamworth News*, which was vehemently protectionist (Milliss 1980, pp.143-144).

Influence on election results

Newspapers attempted to influence election results, mainly by giving clear advice to electors on how to cast their votes. It was generally believed that the press significantly influenced voting, and in a number of polls the influence of the press was thought to have been decisive. For example, the defeat of Charles Wilson for the Armidale seat in 1901 was believed to have been largely the result of attacks made on him by the *Armidale Argus*. For six months before polling day the *Argus* (1901) attacked Wilson repeatedly, accusing him, amongst other things, of retaining office as an alderman on the municipal council to make his parliamentary position more secure. The victory of the Labor

candidate in the contest for New England in the 1906 general election was attributed by many newspapers of differing political opinions to the strong support he received from the many newspapers which had for many years consistently supported a policy of tariff protection. Grant Harman showed that the majority of voters in the Armidale electorate followed the line advocated by the *Express* in 1901, 1919, 1922, 1925 and 1929, but not in 1903 and 1910. At Tamworth, the electors followed the line of the *Observer/Leader* in 1903, 1914, 1919, 1922, 1925 and 1929, but not in 1901 and 1906. At Glen Innes, the electorate followed the *Glen Innes Examiner's* line in 1901, 1906, 1913, 1919, 1922, 1925 and 1929 (Harman 1975, p.234). Newspapers naturally were proud of their political influence. Two years after its establishment the *Uralla News* (1906) boasted of its political accomplishments, which included securing government action to conserve a local lagoon, helping establish a butter factory, initiating a move to put the local cemetery in order, and helping to secure the election of councillors to the shire council and the return in 1906 of Foster as member for New England.

News columns used as means of influence, too

Provincial papers gave space and prominence to electoral lists, announcements and advertisements, and to election reports and editorial comment on them: information “essential to the operation of the machinery of representative and responsible government” (Morrison 1991, p.137). The editorial column was not the only means by which newspapers attempted to influence public opinion. Obviously, the selection and reporting of news items provided an effective means by which the press could espouse certain ideas and causes. The blatant use of news columns for propaganda purposes was common. For instance, in 1901, to help the sitting member’s prospects for re-election, the *Armidale Express* reported that “a prominent Minister of the Crown” (a vague identity) who visited Armidale for the Federation celebrations had told the paper’s editor in a private conversation:

You are fortunate in getting a stamp of a man like Wilson to represent you; he is, I can assure you, the best-liked man in the Assembly; there is not a member in the House with more personal influence.

In the style of a number of papers, the *Express* regularly used an odd jottings column entitled “Events and Rumours” and later “Facts and Rumours” for propaganda purposes. In 1899 during the Federal referendum campaign, for example, in this column it reported: “It is said that the merchants of Sydney are doing their utmost to defeat federation (Harman 1975, p.230).”

Newspaper support for Labor

In the colonial period, it was not unusual for some provincial newspapers to support the emerging Labor party. In 1898, W.A. Holman, who became the Labor premier of NSW from 1913-20, bought the *Grenfell Vedette*. From August 1902 until August 1904, when Holman sold it, the *Vedette* was edited by Harry Holland, a militant socialist at other times but most discreet and restrained in his conduct of the paper. Holland found the paper at a low point but more than doubled its circulation and trebled its turnover in his two years there (Walker 1976, p.186). J.L. Treflé, proprietor of the *Temora Independent* for 20 years from 1895 (in partnership, from 1907, with J.A. Bradley), was a State Labor member for nine years and a from 1910 until his death in 1915 (Ritchie 1990, pp.254-255; Bradley 1990, p.9). T.M. Shakespeare (whose cousin Tom Brown was the Labor member for Canobolas) revealed Labor sympathies. Shakespeare, founder of *The Lachlander*, Condobolin, and owner until 1902, and proprietor of the *Grafton Argus*, 1902-1904, left the party over the conscription issue (Walker 1976, p.184). He established the *Canberra Times* in 1926. At Wellington in 1889, Michael Conlan O’Halloran established the *Wellington Times and Australian Industrial Liberator* on 23 May to espouse the Labor cause (Register of Newspaper Recognizances and Affidavits). The *Newcastle Morning Herald* (1876) set out to be “the only fearless advocate of the legitimate rights of labour in the Hunter River District, or in the colony”. The *Barrier Miner*, an evening daily at Broken Hill, supported the miners’ strike so warmly in 1892 that the Special Magistrate Whittingdale Johnson complained that the paper criminally libelled him almost every day. The *Miner* was not prosecuted and flourished up to the time of the next great strike in 1909 (Walker 1976, p.166).

By then, the union-owned *Barrier Truth*, established in 1898, had become a daily. From July 1899 the *Truth* appeared as the official organ of the Barrier District Council of the Australian Labour Federation. It concentrated on local and on general Labor news and had very little other news. When it began to provide a women's section in 1902, and more sporting news and racing results, its circulation almost doubled to just over 3000 in nine months. On 2 November, 1908, it became the first Labour daily in Australasia (Walker 1976, p.177). Almost alone among Labour papers in Australia, Bathurst's *National Advocate*, which survived 73 years, was profitable and regularly returned to shareholders a 10 percent dividend. Hilton Radcliffe "Bull" West edited the paper from 1914 until 1956, a few months before his death on 29 April, 1957, aged 79. West expressed moderate Labor views. During the Lang schism the *Advocate* picked a delicate path, attacking Langism, but advising a vote for C.A. Kelly, the local member who was in the State Labor Party (Kirkpatrick 1996, p.61; Walker 1980, p.170). At Grafton, *The Grip* was seen to have Labor sympathies. In 1899 creditors forced "Fighting Tom" Penrose out of the editorial chair; his sister Susan took charge. The poet and freelance journalist, Edwin Brady, became co-proprietor of the bi-weekly *Grip* in July, 1901. Brady was a Laborite, and the local member, John See, held office as Premier from 1901 to 1904 with the aid of Labor votes. *The Grip* had opposed the election of See, whom it accused of not promoting the North Coast railway as vigorously as he should, but there was much in the government's policy of which Labor, and Brady, approved (Walker 1976, pp.186-187).

The birth of the *Australian Worker*

The newspaper that eventually became the *Australian Worker* owes its birth and its resurrection to the provinces of NSW. On 19 October, 1891, Arthur Rae and W.W. Head published the first issue of *The Hummer* on behalf of the Wagga Wagga branch of the ASU and the GLU (the ASU was the forerunner of the AWU, or Australian Workers' Union). *The Hummer* (1891) set out to "advocate Unionism; not only Unionism in Labour, but Unionism in politics likewise". It had taken the advice offered by the metropolitan papers during the "Big Strike" to act "constitutionally by redressing our wrongs at the ballot box".

We want to form a big, solid, compact Labour Party right through Australia; a Party that can watch the interests of the Workers both inside and outside of Parliament, and counteract the moves continually being made by Organised Capitalism to crush Unionism, or to rob it of its usefulness, which comes to the same thing.

The paper's title was inspired by the militantly "humming" tone of the union circulars that were issued at the time of the shearers' strike. Rae and Head told their readers that so long as the people continued to read, "*The Hummer* will continue to hum". There were about 5000 members of the two unions in Wagga Wagga, and if every member took a copy — priced at one penny — "we can keep *The Hummer* going on a circulation of five thousand and two". It appeared until 24 September, 1892, as *The Hummer*, and then became the *Worker*. It was published at Wagga Wagga until April, 1893, when it shifted to Sydney. During the 1894 elections, it was published daily for several weeks to help Labor in 1894 elections, but lost £1000 and took a long time to recover. When it suspended publication from February 1897, the Bourke branch of the AWU revived it six months. The branch, which had 3500 members, bought the paper for £537 and paid its debts. Bourke branch secretary Donald Macdonnell canvassed for subscriptions, donations and advertisements and appointed local agents to distribute the paper. No subsidies were needed in 1898. From October 1897 the *Worker* incorporated the *Australian Workman*, which had begun on 22 September 1890; it became the *Australian Worker* in November 1913 (Walker 1976, pp.134-137).

Launching pads for political careers

Provincial newspapers in the Australian colonies were often the vehicles for political causes to be pursued overtly, sometimes on behalf of factions, sometimes on behalf of individuals. Some proprietors either set out to achieve parliamentary status, or adopted that goal along the way. The biographical registers of state and federal parliaments are sprinkled with the names of those who jumped the fence, sometimes back and forth, between newspaper ownership and/or editorship and politics. Newspapers were often used as, or became, the launching pads for political careers.¹ In the NSW Legislative

Assembly up to 1880 at any one time no more than two practising journalists had held seats, but their numbers soon increased with the prolific expansion of the press in the eighties, the emergence of party politics instead of factionalism, and the payment of members. In 1887 there were eight journalists and newspapers proprietors in the House; in 1891, and again in 1898, 15; at these dates they formed, respectively, 6.4, 10.5 and 12.0 percent of total membership (Martin 1956, pp.46-67). Grant Harman found that between 1898 and 1932 at least four journalists and newspaper proprietors from New England and one from the adjoining Dorrigo plateau actually secured Parliamentary seats — three at a State level: two in the Legislative Assembly and one in the Legislative Council; and two at the federal level: one in the House of Representatives and one in the Senate. “Newspaper proprietors had a decided advantage over other candidates in running for public office,” he commented. “Their position gave them contact with party officials and the opportunity to become well known in their communities, and they were spared the expenses of newspaper advertising.” (Harman 1975, p.222) The first country journalist to become Premier was William Arthur Holman, a cabinetmaker by trade, who bought the *Grenfell Vedette*, with his father’s assistance, shortly before the 1898 elections. Holman, who contributed articles to the *Vedette* from 1895-98, was elected to Parliament from 1898 to 1920. At Grenfell, the protectionist *Vedette* and the free-trade *Record* engaged in mortal combat with voluminous attacks on one another (Connolly 1983, p.151; Walker 1976, pp.186, 188).

Local MPs and the press

All country newspapers promoted vigorously the material and social advancement of their town and district. In the absence of local government, competition for roads, bridges, schools, public buildings, railways and other amenities depended much on the local member supported by a public marshalled by the press (Walker 1976, p.176). In pursuing these goals, the press sought to influence a number of separate centres of power, both directly and indirectly. The New England papers, for instance, attempted to influence the direction and intensity of public opinion; they also tried to focus public opinion on

specific issues and on these to develop particular points of view; and they attempted to influence the local members of parliament. Because members of parliament believed the press was extremely powerful, they were easily influenced by it. Newspapers gave local members clear indications of what policies they expected them to support. If a member followed a newspaper's directives he was accorded generous publicity; when he did otherwise, his actions and even his personal qualities were criticised and ridiculed. Even politicians who received regular support from a particular newspaper were reprimanded when they failed to live up to expectations on a particular matter. For instance, in 1905 the *Armidale Express* censured S.J. Kearney severely for his failure to arrive from Armidale at the Legislative Assembly in time to record his vote against the north coast railway bill. Until at least the 1920s the press occupied an important place in New England political life (Harman 1975, pp.230-231). Rare were the issues on which provincial newspapers sought to remain apolitical, but in Bourke the *Western Herald* and the *Central Australian* attempted this, possibly in collusion, during the shearers' strike in 1891. A careful scrutiny of the Bourke papers' files during this period "reveals little mention of the shearers' strikes, and it was left to the city papers to report the unrest". Burrows and Barton (1996, pp.49-50) suggest the local censorship of the issue was to avoid alienating readers through taking sides.

Sustenance, not just survival

As America expanded westward, the "first task of the printer in the upstart city was to bring into existence a community where the newspaper could survive", according to Daniel Boorstin (1966, p.126). In fact, publishers wanted more than survival, says Barbara Cloud (1992, pp.14-15). They expected a community to provide them with immediate sustenance, but they also looked for promise of growth and prosperity. "A newspaper has to look to things eventual as well as matters immediate," the publisher of the *Miner*, explained upon beginning publication in Butte, Montana, a town that had been somewhat depressed but was reviving. Throughout the West, three kinds of activity sent particularly strong growth signals: political development, mineral finds and railway construction. Anticipation of

the formation of a state, territory or local government generally accounted for the establishment of one or more newspapers in a given community. In Washington Territory, for example, as confidence grew that statehood was imminent, newspapers multiplied rapidly. In 1887 the territory had about 70 newspapers; in the next two years leading to statehood the number more than doubled.

Official status, at whatever level, conferred political legitimacy on a locale and almost certainly induced a boost in population by assuring hesitant immigrants that the United States government gave its full blessing and protection. For the publisher this not only meant readers and advertisers, but also heightened prospects for power and profit, the power via the influence a publisher could exercise through his paper, the profit via the public printing which would come as a reward for his lending that influence to the winning side.

Publishers supported efforts to form separate territories, win statehood, and create new counties, recognising that new political entities could be economically beneficial to them because of the forms and laws to be printed. The *Columbian* argued for separation from Oregon Territory, the *Mesilla Times* in New Mexico agitated for formation of Arizona Territory, the *Golden Age* in Lewiston campaigned for Idaho Territory, and the first papers in Los Angeles and San Diego called for the splitting of California into two states. Countless papers pushed their towns' advantages as county seats.

In Australia, generally the first political status that the provincial papers sought for their towns was municipal or borough status. Some towns, such as Bombala, Cooma, Tumut, Orange, Armidale and Albury, vied early in the twentieth century to become the site of the federal capital (Clark 198, p.330). As Table 1 shows, Bathurst had its first newspaper 14 years before it became a municipality; Goulburn 11 years; Maitland 22 years; Tamworth 17 years; and Wollongong and Newcastle, four years. Until the arrival of local government within a community, a heavy onus fell on the press to advocate social and material progress. In its first issue the *Armidale Express* (1856a) suggested improvements to the postal system in the district, urged the necessity of a bank in the town, advocated the rapid formation of railroads from good

seaports to the inland. Within a month the *Express* (1856b & 1856c) was advocating the building of many more houses in Armidale and, a few weeks later, entering the debate on the need for a shorter road to the coast.

The papers were naturally the prime movers in the fight for incorporation of their town or district. In the fictitious town of Wattlegum, a *Bulletin* writer, John Farrell, described how the local paper, the *Stiffener*, soon ran a full-column leader on "Incorporation" wherein it showed that nothing else was needed to make Wattlegum "second to no town in the colony". The *Stiffener* had no doubt that the people would "recognise in it a sturdy champion who was to be found in the van of every movement for the public good" (*Bulletin* 1885, p.20). At the very real Richmond River town of Coraki, Louis Ferdinand Branxton Benaud established the *Richmond River Herald* on 9 July, 1886, and waited only until its third issue before advocating that the town be incorporated into a municipality, thus beginning his long career of advocating Coraki's interests. Coraki was a "government village", as opposed to a town built on private land, and, by 1890, this status was seen to be holding it back. The Municipal District of Coraki was eventually gazetted on 10 September, 1890 (Curby 1992, pp.10-11). The *Queanbeyan Age* (1960, p.1) from its earliest days, "sought to bring before the citizens the advantages to be derived by the establishment in the town of organisations for the advancement of social amenities . . . foremost among these was that of incorporation of the township". Bega's *Gazette* (1873) strongly supported the incorporation of the town as a municipality.

The Bega folks will, we hope, rouse themselves from their present state of torpor, and energetically frustrate the selfish and short-sighted views of the leaders and *the led* who are now baulking every scheme for the progress of the town, except perhaps, those one or two particular schemes which promise an immediate inflow to their own pockets. This town is ready for incorporation, and those people are stupidly blind and no friends to Bega who oppose it.

Table 1: Dates 20 selected districts attained municipal status and obtained their first newspaper²

Name of Municipal-ity of borough or Municipal district	Date of incorpo-ration	Year of establishment of first news-paper	Name of first newspaper for district
Albury	1859	1856	<i>Border Post</i>
Armidale	1863	1856	<i>Armidale Express</i>
Bathurst	1862	1848	<i>Bathurst Advocate</i>
Bega	1883	1864	<i>Bega Gazette</i>
Bourke	1878	1872	<i>Central Australian</i>
Cooma	1879	1861	<i>Monaro Mercury</i>
Cootamundra	1884	1877	<i>Cootamundra Herald</i>
Dubbo	1872	1866	<i>Dubbo Dispatch</i>
Goulburn	1859	1848	<i>Goulburn Herald</i>
Grafton	1859	1859	<i>Clarence & Richmond Examiner</i>
Hay	1872	1871	<i>Hay Standard</i>
Lismore	1879	1876	<i>Northern Star</i>
Maitland West	1863	1841	<i>Hunter River Gazette</i>
Murrurundi	1890	1871	<i>Murrurundi Times</i>
Newcastle	1859	1855	<i>Newcastle Telegraph</i>
Tamworth	1876	1859	<i>Tamworth Examiner</i>
Tenterfield	1871	1861	<i>Tenterfield Chronicle</i>
Wagga Wagga	1870	1858	<i>Wagga Wagga Express</i>
Wollongong	1859	1855	<i>Illawarra Mercury</i>
Yass	1873	1857	<i>Yass Courier</i>

Through the columns of the *Port Macquarie News* (1922 & 1982), established in 1882, the founder, Alfred Edward Pountney, advocated incorporation for the district. He was the secretary of the Hastings River Progress Committee and the poll clerk, scrutineer and returning officer for the first Municipal Council elections held in 1887. At Quirindi, William Hawker established the town's first paper, the *Quirindi Gazette*, in January 1885, and advocated incorporation of the town — something opposed by the second paper, the *Argus*. The municipality was gazetted on 29 December, 1890 and Hawker was elected the first mayor on 5 March 1891. He was an alderman for 20 years (Durrant 1994, pp.103-104; *Quirindi Advocate* 1985, p.6).

Conclusion

The pioneering NSW provincial newspapers generally began by declaring their independence from political influences, or by declaring they were being established in the liberal interest. Their proprietors were much less likely to be political animals than proprietors of American newspapers in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Editors were prepared to take a stand on major issues, such as the Land Acts and the free-trade debate. They were also prepared to influence election results by giving clear advice on how to vote. Even the news columns were used as a means of persuasion by different papers. The emerging Labor political forces won the sympathy of a number of provincial papers, and two provincial towns played a key role in the birth and resurrection of what became the *Australian Worker*. Some proprietors used their papers to launch political careers, and others were drawn into politics after publishing successful papers. All provincial papers tried to influence the political process favourably in terms of expenditure on their towns and districts. Many promoted their towns as suitable for incorporation as boroughs or municipalities. In all, the provincial press of NSW played an important role as a forum for political debate in the colonial era and in the early years of the newly established federal compact.

Notes

1. Compositor James Christian Watson, NSW, and journalist Andrew Fisher, Qld, both became Prime Minister.
2. This table was inspired by a larger one prepared by Major Kenneth Sanz, of Sydney. The local government source was: F.A. Larcombe, *History of Local Government in New South Wales*. The newspaper establishment dates are drawn from the author's research.

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Cosmetic surgery magazines: mass mediating the new face of medical practice

By Anne Ring

Suddenly, in mid-1998, a flurry of mass magazines about cosmetic surgery appeared in the women's magazine section of newsagencies. This was a remarkable development in that it was — and still is — the first time that a particular type of medical practice has been featured in this way. This article provides a rationale for the emergence of the new phenomenon, as a context for examining the distinctive and innovative ways in which the new face of medical practice — and their practitioners — is currently being mass mediated by two cosmetic surgery magazines. In view of the fact that the timing of these commercial publications can be linked with the recent and progressive deregulation of advertising by doctors in Australia, a critical issue addressed in this analysis is the extent to which associations can be drawn between the editorial and advertising content in these magazines. The possibility of such associations is a pertinent consideration in the light of the public debate about editorial independence surrounding the 'cash-for-comment' case involving the Sydney radio station 2UE in the latter half of 1999.

As we approach the third millennium, the medical technology available to cosmetic surgeons is at a level where they can deliver the sorts of cosmetic improvements that the traditional cosmetics industry can only promise (e.g. *Choice Report* 1998). And this is happening in an era where body image not only remains a chronic concern for women in general, but is becoming an issue for a steadily increasing proportion of the male population (Barthel 1988; Macken

1993; Maksen et al 1998). How good you look and how young you look are seen as having a major influence on relationships, employment and general well-being (Harkness 1994; Scott 1998; Spowart & Mastrantone 1999); and the main message of the whole cosmetics industry — of “look good feel good” — is falling on receptive ears (Spowart and Mastrantone 1999). This is the need that a new wave of cosmetic surgery magazines maintains that it is responding to, by providing comprehensive information about all the ways that cosmetic surgery can enhance a person’s self esteem through an ever-growing range of medical procedures and allied products (Ring 1999a).

At the same time, however, we need to be aware that — with very few exceptions — cosmetic surgery procedures are not eligible for a Medicare rebate in Australia (Harkness 1994). This has a number of consequences, including the fact that potential consumers are, therefore, not financially advantaged by going through the usual general-practitioner-to-specialist referral route. They can just walk in off the street to *any* medical practitioner who offers the cosmetic procedure(s) that they are seeking; and, legally, this service can be provided not only by plastic surgeons, but by any basically qualified doctor, regardless of how much or how little training they have had in those procedures (Spowart & Mastrantone 1999). The important point here is that the relationship between the potential consumer and service provider can be a direct one, without mediation or quality control by a referring doctor.

A key question for the rapidly growing numbers of cosmetic surgeons, therefore, becomes: how do you get known? How do you tap into a market that has been described in the following terms by a cosmetic surgeon, at the 1999 Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery conducted by the New South Wales Health Care Complaints Commission (NSWHCCC):

You have to recognise that cosmetic surgery is the nearest thing you’re going to get to retail medicine — or retail surgery. You’re not treating sick people, we’re not treating people who need to have pathology addressed. This is the surgical or medical end of the beauty industry, and the doctor as the performer is not doing it for altruistic reasons — nobody has a calling to

doing cosmetic surgery — they do it because they like it, they enjoy the environment and it makes them a good living (Fleming, in NSWHCCC 1999, p. 170).

Retailing the services of cosmetic surgeons: the window of opportunity

The capacity for Australian cosmetic surgeons to “retail” their services to a large enough potential client group to enable this “good living” has been greatly assisted by the gradual implementation, over the past few years, of the National Competition Policy (NCP) in this country. As one of the consequences of this policy, medical practice in general is being reconstructed more explicitly as a commercial enterprise with the same rights as other businesses. This includes the important right to advertise, an area which, up until recently, has been highly regulated by all state and territory medical boards in accordance with the strict ethical standards that have traditionally been associated with this profession (Walton 1998). As a result of strong pressure from the NCP’s implementation arm, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), more and more of these boards have been deregulating advertising by doctors (Ring 1999b). By mid-1998, this had occurred in all three states with large numbers of cosmetic surgeons (Victoria, Queensland and New South Wales), and it was at this point that four magazines about cosmetic surgery hit the stands, almost simultaneously (Ring 1999a).

Cosmetic surgery magazines: a new mass media phenomenon

For the first time in Australia, a particular type of medical practice was being marketed under the rubric of special interest mass magazines. The new publications were: *The Complete Guide to Cosmetic Surgery + anti-ageing* (a one-off publication from Australian Consolidated Press), *Gloss* (a now defunct magazine about anti-ageing and cosmetic surgery published by Atlantic and Pacific Publishing), and the still extant *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* and *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*. All of these magazines

promised their readers information that would be educational, honest, up-to-date, in-depth and what one editorial described as “*medically authoritative*” (Kearney, in *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine*, Vol.2, 1998, p.4).

A preliminary analysis of the types of messages and images that these magazines actually convey about cosmetic surgery has been carried out by the author, with the findings presented in a variety of forums and publications (e.g. Ring 1998; Ring 1999a; Ring 1999c; Ring 1999d). Essentially, they suggest that while some cautionary notes are struck, the overarching message about cosmetic surgery is an extremely positive one, with all four magazines promoting this — in part — through the use of some of the standard cosmetic industry marketing tactics based on ideal and misleading body imagery:

This included “glossy illustrations of perfect young womanhood . . . and before-and-after shots of transformations that are only partly due to the outcomes of the procedure. Most of the ‘after’ shots also include one or more of a variety of potentially enhancing features, from changes in hair style to background lighting” (Ring 1999d, p.11).

At the same time, however, the two periodicals that are currently being published also demonstrate some very interesting differences — both from conventional magazine practice and from each other — in the ways in which they are communicating information about their core subject, and its practitioners. An examination of these differences raises the question of the extent to which the agenda of these magazines is, in fact, set by the imperatives of promoting individual practitioners and allied services and products on the one hand, and their own publishers’ services on the other.

As a starting point, a key factor that differentiates these two magazines from many of the wide range of conventional mass magazines currently being marketed to women is that each of them is published by a company which offers a range of other promotional and advertising services as part of their core business. At the same time, however, the set of services offered by each has some features which distinguish it from the other. And the differences between them are consistent with the very different approaches each has in presenting cosmetic surgery and cosmetic surgeons. The two magazines are the

Cosmetic Surgery Magazine, published by Gadfly Media, and *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, published by Deyan Propriety Limited (P/L). Both of these companies are Sydney-based.

Cosmetic Surgery Magazine, and its publishers

Gadfly Media also promotes its services as ‘specialists in surgery brochures and promotional folders, medical communications, [with] excellence in graphic design, marketing and training aids – for the medical and pharmaceutical industry’ (in *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* 1998, p.23). In the promotional page from which this quote was taken, a reduced size cover page of the first edition of this magazine is included as one of the illustrations of its work. To match the professional tone of its promotion, its cosmetic surgery magazine projects a solid medical image which is substantiated by an illustrated “contributors’ ” page presenting four columns of mainly medical and dental contributors who are also included in the magazine’s masthead.

In a move that might be regarded as delivering coals to Newcastle, Gadfly Media has now begun publishing a version of this magazine — under the expanded title of *Anti-aging & Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* — in the United States (inaugural copy 1999). It transpires that, despite the popularity and extensive media promotion of cosmetic surgery in that country (Wolf 1990), it had not — previously — had an equivalent magazine dedicated to this subject¹. In the editorial for the inaugural edition, the use of professional contributors is explained in the following terms, by the editor-in-chief, M. Kearney, who is also the editor of the Australian edition:

There is so much hype surrounding the rapidly expanding field of cosmetic surgery it is often difficult to separate fact from fiction. The time has come for clear, factual and ethical information to be readily available to the general public. It is often easier to understand something when it is explained by an expert, so most of our articles are written by doctors and medical writers (Kearney in *Anti-aging & Cosmetic Surgery Magazine Website* 1999).

In view of this rationale, it is relevant to foreshadow some of the findings presented in the later, content analysis section of this article. In particular, it should be noted that 90 percent of the 30 doctors currently practising in Australia and listed as contributors in the

Australian edition of *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* that was analysed, *also* had a paid advertisement in that edition. Moreover, of the 29 of these doctors who were actually the author and/or headlined interviewee of one or more specific features, more than 60 percent had an advertisement for their services incorporated onto the same or facing page of one of their features. Finally, all of the 27 doctors who had an advertisement (naming themselves and/or their clinic) in that edition were also on the contributors' list.

The editor of that magazine has described the circumstances behind this strong concurrence between the contributing and advertising presence of these doctors in the following terms, to the NSW Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery:

We decided to approach doctors to write articles about their areas of expertise . . . If these same doctors wish to advertise in the magazine because they consider it a suitable environment, so be it (Kearney, in NSWHCCC 1999, p.44).

In the light of this assertion by Kearney, it is also relevant to note the following observation, arising out of a comparison of the contributors to the sixth and seventh issues of her magazine (*Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* issues dated August-October 1999, and November 1999-January 2000). Nineteen currently practising Australian medical contributors appeared in the lists of both magazines. A further 20 such contributors appeared in one or the other issue. Of the 19 who appeared in both, 95 percent had an advertisement in both. Of the 20 who appeared in the list of one issue only, 20 percent had no advertisements, and the remaining 80 percent advertised only in the issue in which they were featured. Such a level of congruence between the editorial and the advertising sectors of the magazine would have to raise some questions about the degree of editorial independence.

The Art of Cosmetic Beauty and its publishers

The publisher of the other extant cosmetic surgery magazine, *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, is Deyan P/L. This company is also associated with Deyan Photography, and, therefore, with Deyan, who — as one of this magazine's editorials points out — is “our favourite

photographer”, with his “portfolio of beautiful images” for the magazine (King in *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, Vol.2, 1998, p.3). In that same edition, an advertisement for this company promotes its services in “portraiture, beauty, advertising” (in *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, Vol.2, 1998, p.49). The emphasis on imagery is maintained in this magazine by the prominence given to the photographer involved in each of its feature articles, and identified more broadly in its pages as being responsible for the production of the “image” component of the article. In the third edition of the magazine, this entity had ascended to the top of the production hierarchy for each article — a major shift from the conventional acknowledgments in magazines, where the feature writer is usually identified as part of the titling, and the photographer’s name (if acknowledged at all) is buried in micro-print alongside their photograph.

Interestingly, the wider services offered by Deyan P/L and Photography have resulted in a crossover of images between issues of the two magazines produced in the third quarter of 1999. An advertisement placed by one doctor in both magazines (*The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, Vol.3, 1999, p.11; *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine*, Vol.6, 1999, p.23) uses a model and accessories featured in an article about that doctor in Deyan’s publication, in which the image is accredited to Deyan (in *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, Vol.3, 1999, p.24).

In addition to its emphasis on image, however, in the first edition of *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty* its publisher also stressed the importance of individual practitioners in the area of cosmetic surgery and allied practices as the source of ‘enormous help . . . in terms of information, expertise and providing access to patients’ (Grujovic in *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, Vol.1, 1998, p.8). At the same time, she described one of the aims of the magazine as being to ‘bridge the gap between leading practitioners and prospective patients’.

Questionable issues

To what extent, then, and in what ways, do these two magazines display the expertise of individual doctors? And to what extent is there convergence of information-giving and advertising, both in terms of the magazines as a whole, and the individual doctors featured in them?

The latter question is an important one in view of recurring concerns about the influence over the editorial content in commercial media, by the advertisers who provide them with a substantial proportion of their revenue (Windschuttle 1988; Silberberg & Magnus 1989; Rubenstein 1990; McCracken 1993; McManus 1994; Hansen 1999). The issue of the editorial independence of commercial media has recently been brought back under public scrutiny (Ring 1999e), with the Australian Broadcasting Authority's investigation of the "cash-for-comment" case involving the Sydney radio station, 2UE, and two of its key talk-back hosts in the latter half of 1999 (Dodd 1999, p.6).

It is, therefore, appropriate to raise the question of the potential for the blurring of distinctions between the editorial and the advertising content in commercial magazines which focus primarily on not only the provision but also the providers of cosmetic surgery, in both of these sectors of content.

A comparative analysis of two cosmetic surgery magazines

The remainder of this article considers these questions through an examination of the distinctive and innovative ways in which the new face of medical practice is currently being mass mediated by these two cosmetic surgery magazines. The basis for this examination is the findings presented in this section, from an analysis of an edition of each of these magazines published contemporaneously in the third quarter of 1999: the sixth issue, or volume, of *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine*, (August-October, 1999) and the third volume of *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*.

Tables 1 and 2 highlight key differences between the two magazines, in the basic layout of each of the issues (in Table 1), and in the presentation of cosmetic surgery and its practitioners (in Table 2).

Table 1: Comparison between key elements of the layout of the two cosmetic surgery magazines.

Aspect	<i>Cosmetic Surgery Magazine</i> Issue 6, 1999	<i>Art of Cosmetic Beauty</i> , Volume 3, 1999
General structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A few advertisements clustered in front, but generally interspersed with feature articles throughout. In approximately 40% of these, a feature identifying a particular service provider or type of product was accompanied by an ad for that provider/product. * The whole issue was subdivided into topic headings, with a number of features per specified topic. Most of the ads were also located in appropriate topic sections. * The reverse covered back part of this issue was given over to a special 'Annual Men's Guide'. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * A concentration of ads at the front, with the remainder interspersed throughout the magazine. None of the ads proximal to features about the advertised provider/product. * Features all independent from each other, with no particular sequencing of topics. * The sub-title of this magazine is <i>Cosmetic Beauty for men + women</i> (but was only seen in the women's magazines section of newsagencies); and the fewer features targeting men are interspersed with those targeting women throughout the magazine.
Features	<p>Overview Most features were 1-2 pages long.</p> <p>Images per feature Generally took up $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ of total space. Extensive use of before-and-after pictures in medical and dental articles – often grainy and amateur-looking and sometimes offset by large</p>	<p>Overview Features were 1-4 pages long.</p> <p>Images per feature Generally took $\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{2}{3}$ (with a range of $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$) of total space. All high quality, professionally photographed, and mostly of ideal models. A few 'signifier' pictures communicating main message. All before-and-after pictures segregated to a back</p>

Aspect	<i>Cosmetic Surgery Magazine</i> Issue 6 – 1999	<i>Art of Cosmetic Beauty</i> Volume 3, 1999
	<p>illustration of ideal model/body. In articles about allied beauty products and services, ideal models used exclusively.</p> <p><i>Text per feature</i> <u>Heading</u> = clear statement of topic. <u>Sub-title</u> usually referred to specific service provider[s]/product[s]. <u>Body of text</u> = Key points highlighted throughout in various ways, e.g. subtitles, boxed sections, shaded and coloured backgrounds.</p>	<p>section of quality ‘case study’ photos.</p> <p><i>Text per feature</i> <u>Heading</u> = approximately ¼ page with bolded allusive phrase signifying topic. <u>Sub-title or highlighted text</u> = Unattributed quote from within story. <u>Body of text</u> = smooth, unbroken narrative for most features.</p>
<p>Advertisements <i>[Ads]</i></p>	<p>one eighth – 2 pages; and most likely to be smaller when integrated with an article authored by/featuring the advertiser.</p> <p>Use of ideal bodies common; some use of more professionally photographed before-and-after pictures, and occasional photos of service providers.</p>	<p>1 or 2 pages. Extensive use of ideal models; occasional use of more professionally photographed before-and-after pictures, and rare photos of service providers.</p>
<p>Summary of communication style</p>	<p><i>From Mars:</i> Gritty, in-your-face realities of a male-doctor-dominated medicine-is-messy message, with some mimicry of the look of orthodox professional journals, offset by judicious use of juxtaposed and interspersed ads for professional services, ideal body images and featured beauty services and products.</p>	<p><i>From Venus:</i> Glossy Vogue and vague overarching messages of ideals of beauty, perfection and sophistication projected by the clean lines of the layout and the focus on highly professional production of ideal imagery.</p>

Table 2: Comparison between the two magazines' approaches to presenting and promoting cosmetic surgery and its practitioners.

Aspect	<i>Cosmetic Surgery Magazine</i> Issue 6 – 1999	<i>Art of Cosmetic Beauty</i> Volume 3, 1999
Features on cosmetic surgery procedures	<p>Total no. of features] = 72</p> <p>Total no. of features on cosmetic surgery/medical procedures [CSMP] = 48</p> <p>CSPM features authored by Dr/s = 63%</p> <p>CSMP features where head-lined Dr/s interviewed = 23%</p> <p>CSMP features where interviewed Drs named in body of text only = 13%</p> <p>CSPM features whose layout includes an ad from contributor Dr or their clinic = 40%</p>	<p>Total no. of features = 20</p> <p>Total no. of features on cosmetic surgery / medical procedures [CSMP] = 15</p> <p>CSPM features authored by Dr/s = 0%</p> <p>CSMP features where headlined Dr/s interviewed = 0%</p> <p>CSMP features where interviewed Drs named in body of text only = 100%</p> <p>CSPM features whose layout includes an ad from Dr interviewee or their clinic = 0%</p>
Features on cosmetic surgery procedures	<p><i>Presentation of information about CSMPs in features:</i></p> <p>93%: From the perspective of the doctor as expert – with confident, authoritative tone and largely in own words, either as author or as frequently cited interviewee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About the procedure/s in general terms only [59%], or partially/wholly in terms of Dr's presentation of own or clinic's case study/s and/or experience and techniques [41%] 	<p><i>Presentation of information about CSMPs in features:</i></p> <p>100%: From the perspective of the doctor as expert – with confident, authoritative tone and largely in own words, as frequently cited interviewee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About the procedure/s in general terms only [13%], or partially/wholly in terms of Dr's presentation of own or clinic's case study/s and/or experience and techniques [87%]

Aspect	<i>Cosmetic Surgery Magazine</i> Issue 6 – 1999	<i>Art of Cosmetic Beauty</i> Volume 3, 1999
Cosmetic surgeons/ doctors [Drs] [ie all practi- tioners of cosmetic surgery]	<p>Specific Drs named:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As <i>Contributors</i> on mast-head = 32 On illustrated <i>Contributors</i> page near front end = 32 <p>Of the 30 Contributor-Drs currently practising in Australia:</p> <p>97% = authored &/or interviewed expert</p> <p>90% = an identified advertiser, under own or clinic's name</p> <p>87% = an expert + an advertiser [66% had an ad on the same/facing page(s) as one of their features]</p> <p>Practising Drs featured but not shown as contributor = 3:</p> <p>2 (67%) with a stated working relationship with an advertiser.</p> <p>Professional Body with ad: <i>The Australian College of Cosmetic Surgery.</i></p>	<p>Specific Drs/clinics named:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In Directory of services at back end = 20 <p>Of Drs in Directory under own or clinic's name:</p> <p>100% = interviewed expert</p> <p>45% = an advertiser, under own or clinic's name</p> <p>45% = an expert + an advertiser</p> <p>Drs whose work is featured in case study section at back end = 7:</p> <p>86% = an expert + an advertiser</p> <p>Professional Body with ad: <i>Australian Society of Plastic Surgeons Inc.</i> (two named representatives of which were interviewed experts with no advertisements of their own).</p>
Summary of presentation style	<p><i>Calling a spade a spade:</i> Cosmetic surgery for the pragmatic, means-oriented potential consumer.</p>	<p><i>A rose by any other name would smell as sweet – so let's call it by some other sweet name</i> [with apologies to W. Shakespeare]: Cosmetic surgery for the aesthetic, ends-oriented potential consumer.</p>
Doctors located in both magazines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 8 doctors = featured experts and advertise in both magazines. 2 doctors = featured experts in both magazines, but only have an advertisement in the <i>Cosmetic Surgery Magazine</i>. 	

Without exception, each of these editions was typical of its predecessors in style and content. The exception was in the *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine*'s inclusion of an additional "Annual Men's Guide", that had its own cover at the back of the magazine. This, however, was not displayed at the newsagents routinely surveyed by the author, and the magazine as a whole continued to be located only in the women's magazine section.

Discussion points

Comparing the main messages about cosmetic surgery

Behind the blandly beautiful body images fronting both of the magazines lie very different approaches to depicting cosmetic surgery. Each of the approaches reflects the particular ethos or philosophy underpinning its publishing firm, as outlined in its self-promotional material and summed up by the title of the magazine:

On the one hand, the *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* can be seen as telling it like it is, about cosmetic surgery as real medicine; and this message is matched by an editor with the professional credibility of a degree in pharmacy (in *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine Website* 1999).

On the other, *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty* can be seen as projecting the reassurance of desirably beautiful outcomes in pages that are carefully sanitised to convey only appealing images in the main body of the magazine (with all of the before-and-after pictures relegated to the back section); and this message is matched by an editor whose journalistic experience lies in 'beauty and image enhancement', cosmetics and grooming (in *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, Vol.3, 1999, p. 4).

Comparing the medical presence

The visibility of doctors is very different in the two magazines. In keeping with its stated aim of producing medically authoritative information, the *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* not only relies heavily on the quoted expertise of doctors, but highlights their role in a variety of ways, including the aforementioned illustrated register of medical contributors, and the prominent display of the names of specific

experts as authors or interviewees of most of the articles on cosmetic surgery procedures. The articles themselves, moreover, are styled along lines similar to those in some professional journals; and because of this it is important to note that at the NSW Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery its editor acknowledged that “it’s not a medical journal as such. We have no editorial board. Every doctor that submits a piece is a fully qualified and registered medical practitioner, which is obviously the requirement” (Kearney, in NSWHCCC 1999, p.52).

From the Table 2 comparison of doctors who contributed and those who advertised in Volume 6 of this magazine it can be concluded that the majority of the former also considered that — in Kearney’s earlier phrase — the magazine is a “suitable environment” in which to place advertisements for their services. It is also worthy of note that for a majority of these doctors the placement was integrated with an article for which they were the identified expert. This juxtaposition of the two faces of the doctor — as both authoritative expert and self-promoter — could be construed as having the potentially confusing messages that can come from what McCracken (1993, p.102) has referred to as a “contradictory montage”. In visual terms, this may have the same impact as a cosmetic surgery advertorial. And, as the Committee of Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery (1999, p.59) has pointed out, this can have the effect of “blurring the line between advertising and information. These may promote a professional association, an individual doctor or clinic, a particular procedure or a product.”

In *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, on the other hand, the presence of the expert doctor is far more discrete and low key, buried in the body of the text of features about cosmetic surgery procedures, and — for those doctors who have also placed advertisements and/or have included a set of case study pictures — the more promotional messages are located quite separately from the expert role. Interestingly, as Table 2 shows, when compared with the high proportion of cited doctors who advertise in the more overtly *medical* magazine, a much smaller percentage (less than 50 percent) of the expert doctors cited in *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty* have also placed an advertisement in it. All of the cited doctors in the latter are, however, listed in the service Directory at the back of the magazine, either under their own name, or that of a clinic in which they provide their services.

Despite their substantial differences in style and thrust, both of these magazines demonstrate a very similar approach to authenticating the information that they provide, and that is to lean heavily and explicitly on specific, named expert doctors as the primary source of the information on cosmetic surgery procedures. While one of these magazines does so exclusively through the interview mode, and the other also has some features with a cosmetic surgeon as the identified author, a consequence of both of these approaches is that the potential consumer of medical services is provided with some insights into the views and practices of specific, named doctors who are presented in the sort of positive terms that establish them as potentially desirable providers of these services.

It is noteworthy, therefore, that the content analysis of these magazines found that they contained neither a description of the basis for selecting their expert informants, nor the identification of any independent arbiters of whom these informants should be. These gaps are particularly significant in view of the finding that all of the medical providers of cosmetic surgery who had an advertisement in the analysed volume of *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, and almost all of those who had an advertisement in the analysed volume of *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine*, also authored or were otherwise featured as one of the experts in at least one article in the same magazine. This degree of overt concurrence between advertised and featured service providers has not, typically, been reported in analyses of the more conventional mass magazines (e.g. McCracken 1993).

Conclusion: magazines as a logical site to retail medical practice in the new millennium

As McLean (1969, p.1) has pointed out, the origin of the word “magazine” (*makhazin*, pl) is Arabic and “means an emporium, or warehouse, full of goods. But the consumer who buys a magazine buys the whole shop; he (sic) consumes as much of it as he wants — or as little”. And, from the analysis that has been carried out on two new cosmetic surgery magazines, it could be said that the mainly female consumers² of these relatively expensive periodicals (just under \$10

each) are being provided with two distinctively styled publications with a very similar retail function: to serve as displays of not only cosmetic surgery procedures but also cosmetic surgery proceduralists, or doctors, to survey and choose from.

As is typical of any economically viable commercial magazines, however, direct sales to potential consumers of cosmetic surgery represent only one source of income. Another that is shared by most magazines is the substantial sales of advertising space (Amos 1983; Windschuttle 1988; Kiely 1992), and both of these cosmetic surgery magazines carry a number of conventionally styled advertisements placed by cosmetic surgeons or clinics, as well as for allied service providers and beauty products.

Typically, however, the analysis of these magazines demonstrated the explicit presence in the editorial section of all or almost all of the cosmetic surgery providers who had placed advertisements for themselves or their clinics. While this overt linkage³ may simply be a transparent and serendipitous association, the de facto reinforcement of a promotional message could be interpreted as having an advertorial function. The latter interpretation would, in turn, beg the question of a possible cost to the advertiser of such a form of reinforcement.

At the same time, moreover, it needs to be borne in mind that the publishers of each of what this article has demonstrated to be two very different styles of magazines offer a number of other promotional services. A further question that needs to be asked, therefore, is whether these magazines also serve as showcases for those other services, to be appraised by service providers such as those whose services are catalogued within their pages. In other words, do these two magazines demonstrate an innovative extension of the conventional retail role of magazines into a third revenue-attracting arena, to potential consumers of their respective publishers' *other* services?

And, as Australian medical practitioners enter an era in which they have the option of retailing their services directly to the public through all of the advertising and other promotional strategies available to businesses in general, are we likely to see more of these types of mass magazines, dedicated to the cataloguing and display of specific

categories of medical services and their providers? If so, is the potential market for them split along the lines depicted — respectively — in the *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* and *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*, between the appearance of reality and an emphasis on image⁴?

If so, then — in view of the various ways in which their services are displayed, promoted and advertised in (and possibly by the publishing firms of) each of these magazines — “the question of what constitutes ‘advertising’ by doctors therefore needs to be clarified, as do the possibility and types of financial arrangements between publishers and doctors” (Ring 1999c, p.22).

Notes

- 1 The market for a version of this magazine in the USA was identified on the basis of the previous absence of an equivalent standard and style of cosmetic surgery magazine in that country, with only ones of a tabloid, newsletter variety being published (*Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* personnel: pers. comm. to Dr A. Wise, 8 November 1999).
- 2 As reported anecdotally by newsagents. Readership data for these magazines are not currently collected by the national media monitors (Morgan (Roy) Research Centre and AC Nielsen staff: pers. comm., 8 November 1999).
- 3 Which was also present for a high proportion of the other service providers and allied health and beauty products advertised in the analysed volumes of the two magazines.
- 4 The proportions of any such split in the case of these two magazines would be difficult to establish at present (apart from the fact that — to date — twice as many issues of *Cosmetic Surgery Magazine* have been published as issues of *The Art of Cosmetic Beauty*), as neither magazine is audited by the Audit Bureau of Circulation (pers. comm. from Bureau staff, 8 November 1999).

Postscript

Two documents of relevance to this article appeared in October 1999: the Report of the Committee of the NSW Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery (1999), and draft guidelines for prospective medical advertisers (ACCC/HCCC, 1999).

Between them, they provide some preliminary answers to the concluding questions, above, as well as to the broader question posed by this author in her presentation to the NSWHCCC's Inquiry into Cosmetic Surgery:

Have the more entrepreneurial cosmetic surgeons done society and the medical profession as a whole a service? The cosmetic surgery magazines demonstrate how some cosmetic surgeons have jumped on to the commercial bandwagon and how they might be seen as being the frontrunners of a possible future direction for medicine as a meat market. From that perspective, this inquiry into cosmetic surgery can also be seen as stimulating the wider question of how far we as a society, and our doctors as a profession, want medicine to go down the competitive pathway towards a future in which medical ethics risk getting short shrift in a deregulated face-off for profits' (Ring, in NSWHCCC 1999, p.13).

In addressing issues related to the adequacy of regulations for the promotion of cosmetic surgery, the report of this Inquiry, published in October by the NSWHCCC (Committee of Inquiry, 1999), outlined the following developments. Initially, 'the Committee agreed that the ACCC and the HCCC should produce a joint guide that addresses the problems with the promotion of cosmetic surgery, as a first step' (NSWHCCC 1999b, p.60). By June 1999, however, the ACCC and the HCCC had 'agreed to develop a *Guide to the promotion of all health services*. It will cover the problems identified with cosmetic surgery . . . A draft guide is expected to be released for comment in October 1999' (NSWHCCC 1999, p.60).

That draft guide was released on schedule by the ACCC, under the title of *Consultative Draft ACCC/HCCC Guide to the Trade Practices Act for the promotion of medical and health services* (ACCC/HCCC 1999). It was developed "in the context of changes in the laws regarding advertising and promotion of medical and health services", and ensuing "concerns about inappropriate or unfair advertising" (Bhojani 1999, p.1). The "hope" or aim of this guide is to:

Help the medical and health sectors to develop strategies to improve compliance with the Trade Practices Act and relevant fair trading legislation and to take advantage of the opportunities that advertising and promotional activity can provide (Bhojani, 1999, p.1).

Two months have been allowed for the process of consultation of issues covered in the draft guide, which has been widely circulated for comment to stakeholders in the professional, policy, media, consumer, academic and legal

areas. It could, therefore, be said that one outcome of the promotional activities of the more entrepreneurial cosmetic surgeons (in and out of the cosmetic surgery magazines) has been to provide their profession as a whole, and the Australian society at large, with a formal and early opportunity to reflect on some of the issues involved in developing the provision of medical services as a conventionally promoted commercial venture.

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Accentuate the ‘negative’: reality and race in Australian film reviewing

Alan McKee

This article examines the ways in which Australian newspaper film reviewers interpret cinematic representations of Aboriginality. It points out that reviewers use the language of ‘realism’ in order to insist that the reality of indigenous life in Australia is one of suffering and disempowerment, refusing alternative understandings of indigenous culture and survival. Alternative representations of indigenous ‘reality’ are considered, and the importance of this question for indigenous/non-indigenous relations in Australia is addressed.

The *Fringe Dwellers* (Bruce Beresford 1986) is an Australian film which follows the fortunes of one Aboriginal family — the Comeaways — and in particular of their teenage daughter (Kristina Nehm). The film — which is a mixture of comedy, social issues and moments of horror — includes her unwanted pregnancy, and the death of her baby, before she finally leaves the community where she grew up.

Evan Williams, reviewing *The Fringe Dwellers*, compares it unfavourably with an earlier film, *Wrong Side of the Road* (Ned Lander 1985). His dissatisfaction with the former comes from its failure to live up to the standards set by the latter. The earlier piece was, he states:

... as rough as a smoker’s throat after an all-night party. It was a scruffy little piece, loosely scripted, acted mainly by amateurs and shot in black and white. But from first to last, it quivered with truth. It was full of raw anger and pain ... [and] uncompromising realism. The Aboriginal characters

were not the smiling, quaintly picturesque and happy-go-lucky folk we might prefer them to be, but miserable battlers, petty crims, boozers, unemployed drifters — pathetic victims of a white man's society (Williams 1986).

The “truth” of indigenous life in Australia, according to Williams, is “miserable battlers”. It is a world of “petty crims” and “boozers” and “unemployed drifters”. The “truth” of Aboriginality is, finally, that indigenous Australians are “pathetic victims”.

The terminology of this film review is interesting. It is not the eccentric position of an iconoclast: rather, it is supremely representative of the way in which film reviewers in Australia write about representations of indigenous Australia. That is what this article is about.

Cultural reviews in newspapers and magazines — of films, television programs and books — are a fascinating journalistic genre. They represent, for most readers, their most everyday and common encounter with cultural criticism and aesthetic discourses. They suggest ways to engage with representations — here, with representations of indigenous Australians. They suggest to the reader ways in which it is possible to make sense of Aboriginality. They do not simply describe what is in the film — there is always more than one way to describe a film. Rather, they pick and choose which elements of the film they will emphasise, and how these will be evaluated. In doing so, they draw on wider discourses — both aesthetic, and about social situations in Australia — in order to propose ways in which film audiences could reasonably make sense of representations of Aboriginal characters in Australian films.

Making sense of *Blackfellas*

The newspaper reviews of the 1993 film *Blackfellas* (James Ricketson) demonstrate the standard way in which film reviews in Australian newspapers make sense of indigenous characters.

Blackfellas presents the experiences of a group of urban-living Aboriginal people in Western Australia. The film deals with unmarried motherhood, theft, drug-dealing, alcohol abuse, domestic violence, imprisonment, corrupt policing, and finally murder. It also — through

the centring of Aboriginal actors, and the presentation of their sometimes joyful performances — allows for more hopeful readings of community solidarity, cultural continuity and choices for the future. However, these possibilities are never communicated in reviews of the film. These reviews always focus on its presentation of “negative” characteristics: and then celebrate the “realism” of such images.

Raymond Gill interviews James Ricketson, the (white) director of the film, under the headline “Film just a glimpse into Aboriginal life”, allowing the director to claim that the film “presented life as it is” (Gill 1993, p29). For Ivan Hutchinson, *Blackfellas* “takes white Australians into the world of Aboriginal people with . . . surprising honesty” (Hutchinson 1993). In *The Age EG magazine* an anonymous commentator states that: “The film is as frank about race as its name implies, and is vividly honest in its group portrait of Aborigines trapped between two cultures” (Anon, EG 1994, p5). In an interview with Julietta Jameson, David Ngoombujarra — one of the film’s stars — claims: “that’s what its realistically like in Perth” (Jameson 1993, p.17). In the anonymous article on “*Blackfellas* Awarded” in the *Age*, Father F. M. Chamberlain, in awarding the film the Australian Catholic Film Office Award, states that: “*Blackfellas* is a realistic . . . portrait of urban Aborigines” (quoted in Anon, “Arts Diary” 1993, p.1). For Lynden Barber, the film’s relationship to the real is expressed in his comment that it is: “reflecting the contemporary experience of urban Aborigines” (Barber 1993).

These film reviewers all want to make claims that this film represents the reality of Aboriginality in Australia — it is “honest”, “frank” and reflects indigenous experience.

It may not be immediately apparent just how odd such language is: for as readers of film reviews, we are so familiar with it. The claim that a given film shows the “reality” of a situation is a common strategy in film reviewing. Indeed, Colin McArthur sees this as one of the dominant ways of evaluating films in this genre of writing, as he describes the “relentless bludgeoning” of every text by newspaper reviewers who want to describe how far reality has been “captured” by a film or television program (McArthur 1980, p.61).

Nevertheless, this approach to films is worthy of some thought. What does it mean to claim that a film presents the “honest”, truthful, reflective “reality” of indigenous experience? Does it imply that the film adequately represents the individual lives of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people of all areas, social classes, genders and sexualities across the whole of Australia? When the question is posed in such a way, the answer must obviously be “no”. Rather, what such claims about the “truth” of Aboriginality — and the fact that this can apparently be shown in a single film — suggest, is that there is on some higher, abstract, idealistic level a simplistic, easily formulated “truth” that transcends the messy details of individual lives and situations in order to present an inner, essential ideal of the situation. This is what the “realistic” discourses of film reviewing do: suggest that there is a thing called “Aboriginality” which is simple, easily described and easily known to non-indigenous Australian audiences — and film reviewers.

1. “Aboriginality” is: negative

What does this ideal, simple, abstract “Aboriginality” claimed by film reviewers look like?

Firstly, it is composed — as the quotation from Evan Williams” review of *The Fringe Dwellers* quoted at the start of this paper makes clear — of negative elements of culture.

The reviews of *Blackfellas* cited above insist that the film shows the “reality” of indigenous experience. This “reality” consists of the negative elements of the film: in listing its good points, Lynden Barber approvingly includes the fact that: “[i]ts characters variously drink, spend time in jail, steal cars and deal in stolen VCRs” (Barber 1993). This is all seen as realistic; in contrast, Barber throws up an imaginary group of texts and of misguided left-wingers, who would show only “positive” representations: the film displays “authenticity” because it “never pussyfoots around for fear of transgressing zealous notions of political correctness” (Barber 1993). “Political correctness” is a term often employed with reactionary intent in order to imply that an unnamed group of people (“they”) want to stop people telling the “truth”, by making positive representations compulsory. To “pussyfoot”

is to tread overly carefully, to “pussyfoot around” is to avoid a central issue — the truth about Aboriginality — by means of euphemisms and excuses. Similar accolades, and in similar terms, are accorded the film by Stephanie Bunbury. In acclaiming it, she states that “there is nothing worthy or self-consciously correct about *Blackfellas*” (Bunbury 1993, p.49). Again, Bunbury is validating the film for showing negative (realistic) social aspects, as opposed to the false image that a “[politically] correct” film might show.

These journalists approach indigenous representations in particular ways, and with particular assumptions. These assumptions result in a genre of writing in which it is always insisted that Aboriginal Australians live lives only of poverty, crime, violence — and that this is the only “reality” of Aboriginality in Australia. Anything which belongs to the iconography or lifestyle of middle-class existence — home-ownership, suburbia, education, white-collar jobs — cannot be part of the “truth” of indigenous existence in Australia.

Of course, this is not true. There are indeed many indigenous lawyers and doctors and academics and journalists in Australia. Colin McKinnon, from the Aboriginal Actor’s Corporation “Koori Access to Television and Film” course, states that he “would like to see more Aboriginal actors case in major roles as doctors, dentists or police officers. That’s the true picture of Australia” (Perera, 1995: 12). But for film reviewers, this is not the case. Representations of indigenous lawyers are less “realistic” than representations of: “miserable battlers, petty crims, boozers, unemployed drifters”.

This is unsurprising. In wider aesthetic discourses, difficult, negative experiences are always named as more “realistic”. It is part of the term’s meaning (the “gritty” in “gritty realism” may not always be stated, but it is often implied). This is not the only possible meaning of the word — film history names many different aesthetics as forms of realism, from Italian neo-realism (*The Bicycle Thief*) to Hollywood classical realism (*Pretty Woman*). Nevertheless, in contemporary popular aesthetics “realistic” often implies more difficult, negative experiences. It is this use which is made of the term in reviews of indigenous characters in Australian films.

2. Aboriginality is: not funny

Linked to this point is the idea that certain genres of films are better suited to represent Aboriginality in Australia.

As we noted at the start of this article, Evan Williams contrasts *The Fringe Dwellers* with *Wrong Side of the Road*, saying of the later film that: “the futility and desperation [of *Road*] . . . is somehow missing here”.

The Fringe Dwellers includes scenes with a variety of generic affiliations: some are tragic, some comic, some social realist. The film can be dismissed by Evan Williams as unrealistic for its portrayal of “happy-go-lucky folk”; but at the same time, it is open to being read as realistic by other reviewers. Whenever reviewers do call the film “realistic”, however, they do so — like the reviewers of *Blackfellas* — by focussing on the “negative” experiences of its characters. A review of the film in the *Sunday Mail*, for example, headlines with “Aborigines and the way things are” (Anon, *Sunday Mail* 1987), and finds that: “the film lays bare the problem of Aborigines”; Michael O’Regan believes that the film “shows things the way they are and leaves the judgements to the audience” (O’Regan 1987); while for P.P. McGuinness, it is: “one of the most truthful and direct accounts of the real state of the deprived sectors of the Aboriginal community in Australia . . . telling the truth about racism in Australia” (McGuinness 1986, p.51). Once again, the degree to which the film can reasonably be described as “realistic” is that to which it represents the Aboriginal experience in negative terms (“deprived sectors . . . the truth about racism”). This is more explicit in comments by Neil Jillett, for example, where he finds of *The Fringe Dwellers* that: “the film’s greatest strength” is showing that “failure and despair, not hope and success, are the keys to their [presumably, Aborigines] existence” (Jillett 1993). Similarly, Peter Haran, reviewing the film, links the vocabulary of realism to the negative aspects of the film: “it tackles with a brutal truthfulness racism and poverty . . . This is shanty life with all its inherent misery and peopled with no-hopers” (Haran 1986).

Textually, however, *The Fringe Dwellers* is generically diffuse in a way that is not true of *Blackfellas*. Sequences of the film are marked as belonging to genres which are not regarded as realistic: for example,

when the Comeaways, the central characters of the film, move house, the segment seems to be presented as comedy; while Trillby's murder of her child is generically composed as an instance of horror.

In writing about *The Fringe Dwellers*, several reviewers note aspects of the film which are either "positive", or identified as generic (the two ideas are linked in the term "gentle comedy", which seems a suitable one to use in describing at least segments of this film). None of the reviews which take this approach to the film employ the keywords of realism. For example, Ivan Hutchinson describes the film in terms of a pair of opposites: while it "lacks strength" (that is, truth, realism, honesty, and so on), it is "generally worthwhile entertainment" (Hutchinson 1986); Frank Ashboth notes that "the most memorable scene is when the Comeaways move, trundling through the main street of the town in a clapped out old truck". Privileging a scene which seems to be marked as primarily comic (and also upbeat: it is a family event, everyone is together), it would then be difficult for Ashboth to comment on the film in terms of "realism". Rather, for him it is "A gentle [the term does not suggest "realistic"] story of a family" (Ashboth 1987). Again, his review does not employ any of those terms which cluster around "realistic" readings. Similarly, when the anonymous reviewer of the *Daily Sun* describes the film in positive terms — "Beresford's film is a warm-hearted study of a family" — s/he does not then find it necessary to discuss its relation to the presumed reality of Aboriginal experience.

So, for these reviewers, the film is "realistic" (honest, truthful); but only to the extent that it avoids comedy. Again, this is a wider aesthetic discourse — not one which is simply applied to representations of indigenous Australians. All films are representations: none, in fact, show the "reality" of a given situation. But certain genres are commonly understood to be closer to "reality" than others: documentaries, for example, social problem films, gritty drama — rather than melodramas, women's films, comedies or science fiction. So films which avoid these latter genres are commonly understood to be more "realistic". Some reviewers, wishing to emphasise the "realism" of particular (negative) representations of indigenous Australians, use generic labels to insist on their "truth". Paddy McGuinness, for example, in reviewing

The Fringe Dwellers, states that the film is “an important social documentary” (McGuinness 1986), a generic label which clearly marks a privileged relationship to reality. Evan Williams aligns that same film generically as a “study” (Williams 1986), again suggesting a status as information. These genres are more “realistic”, in popular aesthetic discourses — and therefore tell us more of the “truth” about Aboriginality.

3. Aboriginality is: an “issue” and a “problem”

Rachel Perkins’ 1998 film *Radiance* concerns three Aboriginal sisters who return to the family home for their mother’s funeral. Perkins states in an interview that the film is: “not just about Aborigines as a social problem” (Perkins, quoted in Naglazas, 1998: AT6). An interesting thing happens in reviews of the film, though. Somehow, “not just about Aborigines as a social problem” becomes: not just about Aborigines. Full stop. If it is not about social problems, then — the logic of film reviewing goes — it is not *really* about Aboriginality. For without being about the politics, problems and negative experiences of race in Australia, how can it be about Aboriginality? Aboriginality — the abstract, simple, essence which we have been tracing in this paper — exists only as a social problem.

The film is not a gritty drama. It is, variously, “witty and warm-hearted” (Lowing 1998, p.12), with “optimism” (Hessey 1998, p.9), and “a broad grin on its face and a nose-thumbing awareness of how over the top it is” (Eisenhuth 1998, p.72). It “blithely mixes high drama and low comedy” (Eisenhuth 1998, p.72), with a “wicked sense of humour” (Anon, *Daily Telegraph*, 1998, p.8). According to Sandra Hall, “the tone runs the whole gamut from down-home laconic to full-scale operatic” (Hall 1998, p.20); it has: “an upbeat . . . ending” (Sanderson 1998, p.67; Patridge 1998, p.10). It is: “a fiery, Southern-style melodrama” (Rooney 1998, p.100). Given that none of the genres it seems to fit into are gritty or social realist, and that it is optimistic and funny, it is unsurprising that the film is never described as showing the “realistic” “honest” “truth” about Aboriginality in reviews. But what is interesting is the absolute degree to which, if the film is not

about “miserable battlers, petty crims, boozers, unemployed drifters”, then (according to film reviewers) it is not actually about Aboriginality at all.

Some reviews of the film describe the family situation of the sisters without a single mention that they are indigenous (Diwell, 1998b). What is more common is for reviewers to pick up on a comment in the film’s press pack, and insist that although it features indigenous characters, *Radiance* is “profoundly Australian, but with universal themes”.

This supposed “universality” is taken up by almost every single review of the film in Australian newspapers. “The film may be another look at the so-called “black experience” but its strength lies in its universality” (Banks 1998, p.5), says one, and this word is used by many of the reviews of the film (Anon, *Daily Telegraph*, 1998, p.8), (Kennedy 1998, p.20; Partridge 1998, p.10; O’Neill 1997, p.26; Rooney 1998, p.100).

“Incidentally”, comments another reviewer, “the sisters are Aborigines. This has some relevance, but is mostly immaterial. These are universal characters in a universal story” (Juddery 1998, p.19). “The story is not only about Aboriginal problems” says another reviewer: “There are the strife and angst familiar to dysfunctional families no matter their class or culture” (James 1998, p.20); and they: “could fit in anywhere” (Hall 1998, p.20). For Lowing, the characters represent: “people everywhere” (Lowing 1998, p.12).

In one review:

What struck me most forcibly about *Radiance* is that the three Aboriginal women at the centre of things might just as easily have been white . . . *Radiance* is not about Aboriginality — it is about womanhood. The universality of its concerns ...it deals with universal human values and emotions (Williams 1998, p.21).

Once again, this aesthetic claim — the appeal to “universal” relevance and appeal — is not specific to comments on indigenous representation. It is a standard rhetorical strategy in much aesthetic discourse. It is also a problematic one: for there are, reasonably, no experiences in the

world which are in fact “universal” to every man, woman, child, of every race and nationality on earth. It is rather a rhetorical strategy which claims that what I, the reviewer, have experienced, *should* be universal, *should* be what everyone in the world feels like. But once again, this aesthetic strategy is taken up with particular consequences in discussions of the representations of indigenous people in Australian film.

It is important once again to insist that laying claim to the “universal” relevance of *Radiance* is only one possible approach to the film — the reviews do not say this simply because it is the “truth” about the film. There are other possible ways in which it could be approached. Interviews with Perkins, for example (although they also claim that: “the themes and issues are universal — (Crawford 1998, p.6)), insist that the film is “an outlet for [Perkins] to air messages about Aboriginality” (Crawford 1998, p.6), that: “Self-representation [by indigenous people] is really changing things” (Diwell 1998, p.28), that Perkins feels the responsibility to: “become a voice for [her] people” (Crawford 1998, p.6). Although Perkins states that: “I don’t think I’m really making a statement”, she goes on to add that: “but I want to do something that is contributing [to indigenous representation] in some way” (Sutherland 1998, p.45). A review of the film in *Screen International* interprets it in terms of race, suggesting that: “with issues of race always a talking point, it should find a welcome reception on the international festival circuit” (George 1998, p.18). Indeed, an article by Catherine Simpson in *Metro* suggests that:

Radiance has frequently been viewed as a “universal story” ... This ultimately results in a superficial response to the film’s Aboriginality ... It seems counter-productive to overlook the specific socio-historical realities central to the story — the “stolen generation” and the history of dispossession (Simpson 1999, pp.28, 29).

Simpson then goes on to examine the kind of Aboriginality which is represented in *Radiance*.

This is not to suggest that these interpretations are the *correct* ones, and that all Australian newspaper reviewers somehow missed the truth of the film. It is rather to insist that there are a variety of ways in

which any film can be discussed; and it is the choices which are interesting. Because *Radiance* is not about “Aboriginality” as a social problem — because it is not about crims and pathetic boozers — it is therefore, for film reviewers, not really about Aboriginality. Race vanishes, and it is seen as being “universal”.

Evan Williams makes this point explicit by referring back to his earlier reviews of indigenous representation:

I remember reviewing warmly in these pages back in 1982, *Wrong Side of the Road*, a harsh, regretful tale about ... the encroachment of modern urban Australia on traditional black values. But except in oblique and seemingly incidental ways, *Radiance* is not about Aboriginality . . .” (Williams 1998, p.21)

Wrong Side of the Road (indigenous director, indigenous characters, indigenous actors) is “about Aboriginality”. *Radiance* (indigenous director, indigenous characters, indigenous actors) is not: because it is not about social issues.

Again, this is not surprising. “Social problems” are always negative. But it is interesting to see that this transcendent thing called “Aboriginality”, abstracted from the messy reality of individual indigenous lives in Australia, is understood as a “social problem”. Other groups of people are not understood in the same way: for example, in Australia we do not have an abstracted thing called “whiteness” which is seen to be a “social problem”. This is the way in which “Aboriginality” exists, in wider discourses about society in Australia, and in the journalistic genre of film reviewing.

What does this matter?

To summarise, this genre of popular aesthetic discourse contributes to the idea that there is an abstracted, knowable thing called “Aboriginality” in Australia; that it is a serious, negative social problem; and encourages film audiences to understand representations of indigenous Australians in this way. This is important. These are non-indigenous Australians claiming that they know what the “reality” of Aboriginality is.

In general terms, it is disturbing and frustrating to have someone else claim that they know more about you than you do about yourself. In the case of indigenous people in Australia, the claim to know them better than they know themselves has a very particular history, used by white experts as a way to control and manage them, to not allow them any say in how they were treated (because, of course, they couldn't know what was best for them). Bain Attwood names this tendency in Australia "Aboriginalism", claiming that:

Aboriginalism disempowers Aborigines because they are made into an object of knowledge over which Europeans, as the dispensers of truth about their needs and requirements, gain control (Attwood 1992, p.ii).

Such a position of expertise, Attwood further argues, allows non-indigenous people to take control of indigenous lives, "exercising authority over Aborigines by making statements about them, authorising views of them, and ruling over them" (p.i). In newspaper reviews of films featuring indigenous characters we see a particularly unashamed form of "Aboriginalist" discourse: the simple, unabashed claim on the part of non-indigenous reviewers to know what indigenous life — and indigenous people — are "really" like. It is little wonder that there is competition in the public sphere for the right to lay claim to knowing the "reality" of indigenous people in Australia.

Jindalee Lady (Brian Syron, 1992) is a film by an indigenous director which tells the story of Lauren, a successful Aboriginal fashion designer and businesswoman. Discovering that her (white) husband is being unfaithful to her, she leaves him, although pregnant with his child. She gives birth, but the baby later dies. Going on with her career, which becomes increasingly successful, her new (Aboriginal) lover encourages her to avow her Aboriginal heritage more strongly.

As noted above, Colin McKinnon, from the Aboriginal Actors' Corporation "Koori Access to Television and Film" course, wants to see more representations of indigenous Australians in middle-class roles: "That's the true picture of Australia" (Perera, 1995: 12). The publicity discourses around *Jindalee Lady* make similar claims. The film's press synopsis states that:

The major aim of this film is . . . [to offer] the chance for Aboriginals to view themselves, as in reality many of them are, as creatively and administratively successful members of Australia's multicultural society (Anon, Synopsis, 1990).

This is a different kind of "realism" — one which insists that there "really" are Aboriginal people who are "successful" in such ways. Brian Syron, the director of the film, makes particular use of such arguments: "there are in fact, many, many successful indigenes who are working towards goals not much different from those of the dominant cultures in our society" (Syron 1992); "Let's not forget that I am depicting a generation where this is not just a dream, but it is a reality. There are designers out there" (Syron 1993, p.169). Indeed, Syron goes so far as to state that: "I live on a very middle-class level, and I make no bones about the fact that I'm a bourgeois black, or an uptown nigger. I am . . ." (Syron 1993, p.169).

Certainly it may be argued that the proportion of middle-class Aboriginal people is small, and that such images are unrepresentative. However, filmic images have never claimed to be representative. As E.K. Fisk suggests, "the proportion of Aborigines that are abjectly poor is small, but in many sections of the community, they are most visible" (Fisk 1985, p.106). Similarly, Aboriginal people living traditionally-oriented lifestyles have a visibility which is not directly proportional to their statistical representation in the population. Films, or any other cultural product, do not simply reflect populations in statistically-accurate ways. They certainly have not in the history of Aboriginal Australian representation, and they do not in other contexts. It is disingenuous to use this argument to argue against showing these images of Aboriginal people.

Syron's is a discourse of "realism", of what the "reality" of indigenous experience is in Australia, which is just as abstracted and idealistic as the "realism" of the film reviewers I have been discussing. What is of interest for this argument is that neither of these claims is simply "correct". There is no single, simple reality which all indigenous Australians share. Some are indeed "uptown niggers", others do indeed live in positions of extreme disadvantage. What is of interest is that any attempt to claim superior knowledge of the "reality" or "truth"

of a given situation is necessarily an attempt to stake a claim: and sets one up for disagreements and contest over what constitutes that “reality”.

A case study of a “controversy” around *The Fringe Dwellers* is instructive. P.P. McGuinness and Bobbi McHugh are both commentators on this film — both claiming to know “reality”.

McGuinness claims that: “[a] campaign of slander has already been mounted [against the film]”, (McGuinness 1986). Three Aboriginal delegates at Cannes walked out of a screening of the film (Bail 1986, p.17); and Bobbi McHugh, “an administrator at an Aboriginal visual and performing arts centre . . . claimed that [*The Fringe Dwellers*] had set Aboriginal rights back 200 years” (p.17). To describe reactions to the film as a “controversy” seems to be somewhat overstating the issue. Bail introduces the term in her article, but it is in fact difficult to find aggressive attitudes towards the film; most writing expressing sentiments more in tone with the text’s own warm sentimentality. Still, the term “controversy” does accurately convey what is at stake in writing about this film. As suggested earlier, certain aspects of the text render it available for readings in terms of “realism” (death, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, racism, drunkenness); while at the same time, some sequences are rendered as explicitly comic. The presence of both sets of markers in the film opens up debate in precisely the terms: is this a “realistic” representation of Aboriginality, in the terms normally understood in the journalistic invocation of that term?

The pugilistic tone both of defenders and detractors is instructive. On one hand, Merritt presents the view of an Aboriginal reader who feels that the film is dangerous: “It didn’t have a soul because there was no underlying truth” (Bob Merritt, quoted in Bail 1986, p.16). To the unstated question as to what then this “truth” would look like, of what representations would be adequate to the real, Merritt states that: “Aboriginal people are great interpretive artists . . . but this isn’t evident in *The Fringe Dwellers* . . . Aboriginal people get excited over the natural things in life” (quoted in Bail 1986, p.17).

Arguing in the same terms, and equally aggressively, McGuinness produces an interpretation of the film's "realism" which is suitable for the more reactionary site of the *Australian Financial Review*. He finds the film perfectly open to readings of which he approves, and which prove congruent with his view of reality. The film is, for him, realistic. His article, "*The Fringe Dwellers* — an honest look at the Aboriginal culture of poverty" (McGuinness 1986, p.51) provides an interesting example of the ways in which discourse of the real can be mobilised. The reality which McGuinness sees *The Fringe Dwellers* as illustrating is a casually racist one: he promotes, for example, a form of racist "non-racism" (Hall 1981), whereby those demanding rights for Aborigines are labelled "inverted racists"; as though simply by denying that race were an issue would this become true. McGuinness also presents a diatribe against Aboriginal land rights which entirely misses the political dimension of the protest, stating that:

While it is perfectly true that Europeans occupied Australia without the consent of its Aboriginal occupants . . . it does not follow that every claim made for compensation for this past wrong is now justified . . . (McGuinness 1986, p.51)

McGuinness's article contains typically ignorant comments on the components of Aboriginal identity (for example asserting that biology determines personality; and repeating typical redneck fears that Aborigines get life too easy). And, eventually: "The true problem facing many Aborigines", McGuinness asserts: "is not racism at all . . . but the culture of poverty . . . extended families . . . are a major barrier to . . . upward mobility" (McGuinness 1986, p.51).

In making an interpretation which foregrounds the "negative" elements of poverty and despair, McGuinness is free to invoke the language associated with "realism":

. . . the true state of affairs is clearly pointed to in Mr Beresford's film . . . one of the most truthful and direct accounts of the real state of the Aboriginal community in Australia . . . represents a major contribution to setting the record straight, to telling the truth about racism in Australia . . . an important social documentary (p.51).

That this insistence on the reality of the film occurs in the article which also contains the most explicit and aggressive belief in a single “truth” about social reality is not coincidental. The writing of McGuinness illustrates the way in which insisting on a film as “realistic” implies a confidence in “the real” to which the text can be linked. The whole of a society, the experiences of hundreds of thousands of people over hundreds of years, can be accurately summarised in a single sentence by McGuinness, which captures the truth of their entire lives.

In the case of McGuinness, the reactionary nature of the reality he perceives in modern Australia merely draws attention to this process. The writer believes his interpretation of contemporary society is the only correct one. He explicitly rails against those who disagree with him, the mythically politically-correct, those “inverted racists” who would seek to discriminate against the good honest white man such as McGuinness himself. Similarly, there is no doubt on McGuinness’s part that *The Fringe Dwellers* can be only interpreted in one way. Those who have mounted the campaign of slander are not allowed any validity in their interpretation of the film: McGuinness takes it as read that they must have interpreted the film as he has — arguing that Aborigines do not face racism — but cannot admit to such an unpalatable “truth”. If those who disagree with him did not make such an interpretation, it would seem, they *must* be wrong.

McGuinness and Merritt illustrate not only the investment that comes in deciding who may describe Aboriginal experience, but also the implications of bringing to bear discourses of realism in the interpretation of film texts. To assert realism is to claim territories both of interpretation and of social experience — to insist on univocal understandings of both reality and of the texts which illustrate it.

Colin MacKinnon and Brian Syron point out that it is possible to claim middle-class indigenous experience as “reality”. With Bobbi Merritt, they are deeply unhappy with the “reality” of indigenous life which film reviewers claim to know with such certainty. This should at least give pause for thought for those engaged in the production of the popular aesthetic discourses of film reviewing. Claims about the

“realism” of films are never innocent. They always carry assumptions, certain ways of understanding the world. They are, in the widest sense, political claims.

Given the history of white people in Australia claiming to know the “truth” of indigenous lives better than indigenous people know themselves — and the exercises of power which such claims have enabled — the differences between the “reality” of indigenous experience claimed by these reviewers, and that of indigenous cultural producers, should at least require a pause to think. What happens when the terms of “truth”, “honesty” and “realism” are used in relation to representations of indigenous Australians as: “miserable battlers, petty crims, boozers, unemployed drifters — pathetic victims of a white man’s society”?

The recommendation of this article is simple: that journalists who deal with these representations should stop talking about the “realism” of images, and stop using this as a way of celebrating the greater reality of crime, suffering and pain. There are other ways of discussing the function of films and other texts in our cultures. The language of “realism” is a problematic one, and its implications should be thought about carefully.

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Teaching journalism in the information age

Stephen Quinn

The information age — the product of the digital revolution — has massive implications for journalism and journalism education. The key issues include major legal changes associated with the world of cyberspace, the economic consequences of newsgathering in a digital environment, and ethical matters relating to convergence and the increased pace of life. All of these factors will influence the type of education that journalism students need. This paper discusses aspects of journalism education that need to be addressed in the light of these changes. It concludes that the best form of journalism education is at postgraduate level.

For generations, journalism programs throughout the English-speaking world have taught a set of essential skills. Their curricula expected students to learn about collecting good information, writing well and writing for a specific audience, while acknowledging the importance of accuracy — all within a context of an awareness of legal constraints and ethical issues. These are all admirable and necessary skills, and need to be part of any curriculum, but this paper suggests that journalism education in the twenty-first century needs more. The executive director of the Center for New Media at Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism summarised the situation when he noted that most American journalism programs rested on late-nineteenth century teaching models. Their curricula were organised “along early twentieth-century technological lines” (Pavlik 1998). This article accepts the importance of core journalism skills but argues that journalists in the next millennium also need:

- better critical thinking;
- an improved ethical armoury;

- better research and data-management methods;
- computer-assisted reporting, especially use of the Internet and email;
- the ability to cope in a fast-changing environment;
- to work collaboratively, under minimal supervision; and
- to adopt a global perspective

Why do students need these extra tools? Because they are entering an environment that is radically different to what their colleagues in the pre-information age experienced. This paper begins by considering the changing environment as we move further into the information age.

The changing legal environment

Legal issues will be dealt with relatively quickly here, because they are beyond the scope of this article. Massive changes in content — caused by the availability of information in digital form — will produce massive changes in society's response to the issues of copyright, defamation, censorship and privacy. These are major concerns and require separate consideration. The Government introduced the Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Bill 1999 in response to the challenge to the traditional approach to copyright arising from, among other things, the rapid increase in the use of the Internet (White 1999). The changes have generated controversy. Publishers and author groups have warned that rushed changes will leave Australian writers "defenceless in cyberspace". They claim that the government did not leave enough time for responses to its exposure draft of the Bill. This so-called "digital reform bill" was intended to update ageing copyright legislation for the Internet and e-commerce (Manktelow 1999).

In June of 1999, the NSW Supreme Court ruled that any attempt to muzzle an Internet site in that state because it allegedly contained defamation would be unenforceable and legally improper. Justice Caroline Simpson declined to issue an injunction sought by an Australian bank to restrain a former employee from publishing material on the Internet, despite being satisfied that the material "conveyed imputations that were defamatory". The site was published in the United States.

The judge noted that an injunction to restrain defamation in NSW was intended “to ensure compliance with the laws of NSW” but was not designed to superimpose that state’s laws “on every other state, territory and country of the world”. This case has major significance for defamation law in this country (Bice 1999, p.3).

The changing work environment

Sub-editors in Sydney have been producing the features pages of two Singaporean daily newspapers since December 1994, along with some of the publications’ news pages. They edit Life! — the features section of the *Straits Times* — plus foreign news and business, leader and shipping pages in the paper. The 10 full time and five regular casuals on the sub-editors’ table also work on news and feature pages for *The New Paper*, a tabloid from the same stable, owned by the Singapore Publishing Company. The head of the Sydney bureau said the pages were produced in Australia because of “a larger pool of experienced subs in Sydney” These sub-editors receive the same pay rates as on Australian metropolitan dailies, based on their level of experience. Some are native-born Australians and others are migrants from Singapore and Malaysia (Khoo 1999).

The computers in the Sydney office are on the same local area network as in the Singapore office. The Singapore Publishing Company leases a 24-hour dedicated line. The Sydney bureau chief, Teng Guan Khoo, noted:

Working in the Sydney office is like working in Singapore. All subs here log on as if they were in Singapore. We are virtually just in the next room to our Singapore counterparts. There is voice link to Singapore on the same leased line and the Sydney office is just a telephone extension on the main Singapore PABX [internal telephone exchange]. We contact the subs and production dept in Singapore by dialing their extensions. We call up the stories from the Singapore database just like anyone else in Singapore and sub them. There is Picture terminal where we can access the library of current and archived pictures, crop and size them up and send them to production (Khoo 1999).

The completed broadsheet pages are printed in Singapore, either as a proof or a bromide, by hitting an “output” button on the terminals in Sydney. Khoo noted that technology allowed a newspaper in search of skilled labour to open a branch office thousands of kilometres away “and still operate like it was in the next room”.

Microsoft chairman Bill Gates pointed out that in the digital world, jobs go to areas with high skills and low costs:

Knowledge workers in industrialised countries will, in a sense, face new competition — just as some manufacturing workers in industrialised countries have experienced competition from developing nations over the past decade. This will make the information highway a powerful force for international trade in intellectual goods and services, just as the availability of relatively inexpensive air cargo and containerised shipping helped propel international trade in physical goods (Gates 1995, p.261).

The Singapore Publishing Company’s hiring of Australian sub-editors provides an example of Gates’ statement. Khoo noted that another company was about to start a business offering sub-editing skills to newspapers around the world via the Internet, but was reluctant to elaborate because of commercial sensitivity.

Most reporters with the Bloomberg news agency have been multi-skilled since the early 1990s. In 1995 the editor of Bloomberg Business News for Australia and New Zealand noted that technology was changing journalists’ lives “radically”.

The days when most reporters could say they will only work for print or for radio may be fast coming to an end. Every Bloomberg Business News reporter — and there are now 370 reporters and editors in the organisation — is now expected to carry a tape recorder to a press conference and to do broadcast interviews on a regular basis (Howell 1995).

Howell also said that digital technology was having an impact on the size of television camera crews. His 1995 prediction is already a reality in some areas of the world:

Don’t be surprised if reporters of the future turn up at an interview, sit he camera down on a table and produce a broadcast-quality product single-handedly (Howell 1995).

That year Bloomberg Business News had 370 reporters in 56 bureaus, compared with Reuters' 1600 journalists at 128 bureaus. Yet the volume and range of their respective outputs was about the same (Holley 1995, p.47). This immediately raises concerns related to the quality of journalism produced, and the potential for abuse of employees. Is Bloomberg a model for the future world of work? Holley concluded:

Michael Bloomberg makes no apologies for 'sweatshop' conditions. "We hire people who are workaholics," he says. "Anybody I've ever known who's accomplished anything works very hard." . . . Bloomberg's work ethic would seem to be a recipe for burnout and mistakes (Holley 1995, p.50).

Early in 1999, management at Australian Associated Press proposed that reporters use digital cameras and mini-disk voice-recording equipment. The aim was for them to provide sound bites and photographs as well as text. The *Australian* reported that meetings of journalists in Sydney in late March "overwhelmingly rejected the proposal" (20 March 1999). AAP's editor-in-chief said the digital camera and mini-disk proposal was "step one" in the organisation's move from a "text-based provider of news to a multimedia provider" Digital technology meant it was possible to repackage information and "convergence was the future", particularly datacasting associated with the introduction of digital television (Vermeer 1999). With datacasting, digital information such as text and image can be piggybacked on the television signal. As of May when this article was written, negotiations between AAP and its journalists were continuing.

The changing economic environment

The example of the *Straits Times* is happening elsewhere, a reflection of how changing digital technology impacts on the economics of news production. Until this year (1999) Marin county, just north of San Francisco, was a single newspaper area — a common enough situation in the United States. About 110,000 adults read the county's daily, *The Marin Independent Journal*, which first started publishing in 1861. The paper's first editions arrives at news racks and stores about 5.30am, while the afternoon edition is delivered to homes by 5pm.

The paper is owned by Gannett, a Fortune 200 company that publishes more than 90 daily newspapers in the United States, including *USA Today*.

A new daily was scheduled to start in the county in mid 1999. But most of the staff were based not in Marin county, but in New Delhi. Why? Because salaries are considerably lower in India and technology skills relatively high. Digital technology contracts geography. It is relatively easy to produce a daily paper in another country, several thousand kilometres away. The paper employs a handful of journalists in Marin county to produce local stories, along with a bank of telephone salespeople to accept advertising. All other editorial functions take place in New Delhi, headquarters of the publication's owner, the *Asian Age*. Publisher MJ Akbar was reluctant to comment, citing commercial sensitivity (Akbar 1999).

Digital television means a similar scenario could easily occur in broadcasting. In San Francisco, KGO-TV spent \$US25 million in 1999 converting the station in readiness for high definition digital television (HDTV). KGO's senior vice president said that HDTV allowed a master station such as KGO — owned by the American Broadcasting Company, itself owned by Disney — to offer break-outs to up to a dozen affiliates. He noted that video-tape editors in San Francisco were paid on average of \$US 85,000 a year, plus benefits. People doing the same job at one of KGO's affiliated stations in Fresno, about 300 kilometres away, earned \$US 35,000 a year, plus benefits. "It makes economic sense for editors to be working in Fresno, because with digital equipment it does not matter where they are based. This will gladden the hearts of a lot of network accountants (Topping 1999).

Teaching in the information age

Given the changes already occurring because of the digital revolution, how best can journalism educators prepare their students for the information age? Of the list of new attributes offered at the start of this paper, the most essential are a heightened respect for ethics and the need for clarity of thought. Clear thinking and a clear

ethical sense form a strong foundation from which to adapt to rapid change, itself a product of the digital revolution. They provide a moral compass for living in the information age.

The biggest media development in the United States in the past two to three years has been the advent of Web-based publications, most started by entrepreneurs with little cash. One of the features of these start-ups is the blurring of boundaries between editorial and advertising. Indeed, in the digital world even America's greatest publication of record, *The New York Times*, appears to have agreed to something on its Web site that it would never do in the print edition. In early 1997 the paper signed a landmark agreement to place Barnes & Noble "buy" buttons next to its online book reviews (Barnesandnoble.com is a competitor with Amazon.com for the booming e-commerce market in books).

The authoritative *Online Journalism Review* commented:

A careful reading of the hallowed *New York Times* this year [1999] yields jaw-dropping results: In one remarkable 35-day stretch in February and March, the *Times* ran five articles and two opinion columns, clocking in at a whopping 13,800 words total, effectively sullyng the reputation of Amazon.com — Barnes and Noble's biggest and most feared competitor. In only one of those articles did the *Times* disclose its influential agreement with Barnesandnoble.com (Welch 1999).

The *New York Times* itself noted that American media companies had traditionally distinguished between "paid advertising and features created by editors". "But on the Internet, with bookstores becoming literary reviews and news outlets turning into travel agencies, it is getting hard to find a source of information that does not have a financial stake in what users do with what they publish" (Hansell & Harmon 1999). Journalism educators must provide students with the intellectual equipment to enter this rapidly developing area of employment. But this blurring of boundaries means that journalism educators must also introduce more on the ethical issues connected with this and other digital-era practices.

Another feature of Web-based publishing is the dynamic nature of the editorial content. Stories change quickly. The mobile telephone and email allow reporters to contact people quickly and obtain responses to developing stories. This increased speed also increases the potential for errors, and for contacts to provide misinformation, especially in a business environment where people buy and sell shares based on slight changes in the market.

Ethical awareness and clear thinking need to be the foundation stones of any journalism course in the digital age, along with the ability to learn how to learn. Learning how to learn is more important initially than absorbing content. Trainee butchers, for example, need to know how to use their knives before learning about the cuts of meat. Students spend thousands of hours getting an education, but how many hours are spent learning how to learn? As Buzan says, all humans receive a wondrous computer at birth — but where is the manual that shows them how to use it?

Journalism educators need to return more than ever to inculcating the core attribute of respect for accuracy along with clarity of thought. Should and can these be taught? Regardless of the answer, they can certainly be modelled, in the sense that journalism educators can demonstrate the skills via their words and actions. One of the earliest and best pieces of advice I received as a junior academic was that “more is caught than taught”. It is also possible, via problem-based learning scenarios, to place students in situations which require them to think for themselves in terms of ethical issues. In these situations it is important to provide students with opportunities for reflection and discussion. Discussion should take place after reflection. Queensland University of Technology provides an excellent Web site which contains examples which students could use to practise ethical dilemmas <www.maj.arts.qut.edu.au/ethix/>. If students are exposed to enough ethics case studies before they find jobs they are at least fore-armed. As the adage says: “Forewarned is fore-armed” Teaching accuracy is relatively simple. Tell students at the start of their degree that they will be penalised heavily for errors of fact, and stick to the warning when assessing. Reward students who make that extra effort to ensure accuracy; students respond quickly to this carrot and stick approach.

Ethical scenarios need to be carefully controlled. They should probably involve mock scenarios rather than real-life situation. Green expressed concern about allowing journalism students to practise investigative reportage using CAR methods in real-world situations because of the danger of students getting involved in issues beyond their control. He maintained that students undertaking investigative reports “would be best served by doing strictly controlled ‘lab’ experiments rather than live reporting assignments” (1997 p.24). Any educator had a “duty of care” which required that educator “to ensure the students come to no physical, psychological (or legal) harm”. In the case of his students who undertook complex investigative reports, he noted that they “may well have been placed in harm’s way” (1997 p.29).

The ancient Greeks referred to the curse and blessing of any changing environment. The down side of the Web, email and other electronic information sources is the vast volume of data offered. Information overload has replaced information scarcity as an emotional, social and political problem. *New Scientist* magazine reported that on average European business people sent and received 180 email messages a day in 1997. The increased pace in the exchange of information was not a trend that was about to be reversed (Walton 1998). Sports journalist Roy Masters told *The Australian* that he spent at least an hour of every day reading his email and other correspondence. His brother Chris, a reporter with the ABC’s *Four Corners* program, said that 95 percent of his work was sifting through information he received from the public (quoted in McGregor 1999). In a world of information scarcity, journalists perform the vital community service of “acquiring and transmitting fresh data”. But as information has become super abundant over the past 50 years “this hunter-gatherer role has been rendered partially obsolete” (Shenk 1998, p.166):

In fact, journalists are more necessary in the information glutted world. As a sceptical analytical buffer and — now more than ever — as an arbiter of statistical claims, the news media is an indispensable public utility, every bit as vital as our electricity and gas lines. In a world with vastly more information than it can process, journalists are the most important processors we have.

They help us filter information without spinning it in the direction of one company or another. Further, as society becomes splintered, it is journalists who provide the vital social glue to keep us at least partly intact as a common unit. For democracy as we know it, a bypassed media would be a disaster (Shenk 1998, p.167).

Information overload can produce errors, in the sense that students (and working journalists) misreport events because they have insufficient facts, disguised as excess data. Students in the digital world need the new skill of data management. Johnson (1994) suggested that good journalists needed to move past the simplistic formula of an idea plus rudimentary research to produce an adequate story. He maintained that students needed to learn a more evolved process, which he called the RRAW-P process. “The variables in this process can be generalised as Research, Reporting, Analysis, Writing and Packaging. That entails, ideally, eight definable steps for the reporter/writer.” Step one, getting an idea, is followed by the quick, initial — sometimes intuitive — formation of questions and key words related to the idea. The next step involves initial research, which leads to the formulation of new questions. “Ideally, these questions, or hypotheses, expand upon former approaches to the topic and challenge old or current assumptions.” The fifth step, the gathering of data and information, is the real reporting stage. “In the traditional application of the process, a reporter spent most of his or her time interviewing sources on the telephone or in face-to-face conversations. Today, however, an equal amount of time should be spent acquiring quantitative and textual data relevant to the issue.” The sixth step involves analysis of the collected data and information, followed by the reporter sketching an outline for the story. The eighth stage is writing the story and sending it to a sub-editor (1994 p.59).

Johnson says that reporters too often take the simplistic questions of step two and jump to step five “with little more background than the clips from last week’s issues of their own newspaper”. The resulting stories produce a level of understanding, context and perception “equal to what is in a single year’s phone book”. The key stage of Johnson’s process is the research.

That means reporters go not only to the publication or station's library for background data. They must be trained to throw a wide loop around their information resources when asking: What are the major issues relevant to a topic? What is the social, political and economic context? What is the chronology of events leading up to the current news value? Who are the most interesting and knowledgeable sources and where are they? If there is a problem, what have other locales, agencies or individuals done to solve it? What is the cliché interpretation of the topic and what seems to be leading-edge thinking and analysis? Most importantly, what seems to have gone unreported about the topic? We are, after all, in the news business (Johnson 1994, p.59).

Johnson maintains that students must receive a solid grounding in fundamental — that is, traditional library — research techniques early in their degree. They should be able to transfer those generic skills to the digital environment. “Instruction in how a library is organised and works — in tandem with training in relevant computer skills — should begin in the student's first semester at the university and/or in the journalism major. The instruction should continue and be integrated throughout the journalism curriculum at an ever-increasing level of expectation” (1994 p.60).

Changing work practices

The digital revolution is also changing work practices. It is impossible for one person to know everything about a subject or a technology. The era of the jack or jill-of-all-trades is fast disappearing. Journalism needs more specialists and experts, as does journalism education. Steve Doig, a former *Miami Herald* reporter who holds the prestigious Knight Chair in Journalism at Arizona State University, noted that the variety and complexity of skills needed in the newsroom had mushroomed in the past decade. “Ten years ago I was a master of all parts of computer-assisted reporting. Now it would be unrealistic for anybody to think he or she commands expertise across the spectrum” (quoted in Simon & Napolitano 1999, p.22).

But specialisation contains a paradox. As experts acquire their specific knowledge base, the possibility of knowing other subjects and acquiring other skills is reduced. Shenk suggests the “real challenge” for journalists

is the willingness to share information with one another, and to transform it into knowledge. “This is not so much fact hunting as it is data gardening.” But some journalists have difficulty adapting to a new paradigm of sharing information. The “paramount challenge” of the modern journalist is “to be tenders of electronic archives of all human knowledge, more like proactive electronic librarians than news flashers”. Such a world “necessitates a restructured value system in which sharing and summarising existing information is more of a priority than is stumbling onto genuinely new data”. The old paradigm has become outmoded.

New information for its own sake is no longer a goal worthy of our best reporters, our best analysts, our best minds. Journalists will need to take a more holistic approach to information as a natural resource that has to be managed more than acquired (Shenk 1998, p.169-70).

One potential solution is the introduction of team-based reporting in the newsroom, and team-based teaching in the classroom. Columbia University’s Graduate School of Journalism requires students who produce Web pages to work in teams of three: a writer, designer and technical support. Students weak in one area learn from their colleagues. They also experience what it is like in the real world, where people need to cooperate to get the job done (Klatell 1999).

This form of teaching and learning introduces another skill that will be needed in the digital age: the ability to adapt in a fast-changing environment. Can this be taught? Yes, but it is better that it be learned; that is, student must take responsibility for learning. Educators need to establish an environment in which students experience rapid change. Over time, students acquire tolerance and acceptance. But it takes time. Education takes time; that is what differentiates it from training. The Latin root for education is *educere*, as in to draw out or develop. Education is a process, during which students have qualities brought out in them. The three or more years that people spend at university gives them time to develop. Training is not enough in this new environment. You can train a person to recite poetry but as with any form of rote learning the issue is always how much has been understood. It requires education to appreciate poetry, and it needs a special kind of education to create poetry. Should journalism, then, be

offered at postgraduate level after an individual has acquired a degree? In a nutshell, yes. Another option would include offering four-year degrees, which involves making the honours year less academic and more related to learning professional skills. These issues need to be the subject of another article.

Another necessary skill for the digital age is an awareness of innovation, allied with business methods and practices. The keynote speaker at the JEA's annual conference in western Sydney in 1998 predicted that students would be working in careers "not yet imagined, employing skills and technology not yet invented" Dr Jay Black said that many of the jobs now available in journalism and related media did not exist a generation ago. Indeed, some did not exist a decade ago — in the late 1990s we find advertisement for jobs like Webmaster, online reporter and multimedia producer.

Dr Edward De Bono, the internationally-recognised thinker, suggested that entirely new professions would emerge in the coming decade that involved filtering information:

In the future there will emerge a series of intermediary professions — sorters, digesters, researchers — that will act as a kind of reduction valve. It is no longer possible for every user to sort through all of the information they want (De Bono 1999, p.58).

Most of the new positions in the late 1990s have come in new media, particularly Web publishing, and most particularly in niche publishing. Witness the arrival of specialist Web sites for Latinos <www.latino.com> and African Americans <www.netnoir.com>, and specialist sites such as CNET, the computer network <www.cnet.com>. Interviews with the creators of these sites — almost all journalists — produced a prevailing theme. They had received a good education about journalism and technology, but they knew little about the world of business (Singh 1999, CasSelle 1999, Luquis 1999).

Given that we are in the information age, we need to be preparing students for life in this new age. The core segment of a journalism curriculum needs to be information skills. Students should learn to be information workers first before they become broadcast or print reporters. Columbia University's Graduate School of Journalism

established a Center for New Media in 1994 to explore the impact of new technologies on journalism and to “provide intellectual leadership for an industry undergoing rapid transition”. The center’s executive director noted that new media journalism needed to be “more than just another course in an already overcrowded curriculum”:

A new, integrated curriculum is needed in which students are taught the principles, practices, values and standards of news reporting that cut across all media boundaries. Rather than learning to be ‘newspaper’, ‘magazine’, ‘television’, ‘radio’ or ‘online’ reporters, they should simply be taught to be journalists working in a digital age (Pavlik 1998).

Given that journalists and business people operate in a global environment, we need to inculcate a global perspective in our students. That said, we also need to accept that many will work initially as local reporters. The Greenpeace slogan “Think globally and act locally” seems a reasonable response to this situation. Students can use the Internet to cherry pick good ideas from around the world. As an interesting aside, the Pacific Islands News Association (PINA) reported in May that a part-time master of journalism program would be available “soon” to journalists in member countries of the Council of Asia-Pacific Press Institutes. The two-year degree would be offered through a Filipino university working with a German journalism school experienced in online education. Funding would come from Germany’s Konrad Adenauer Foundation (PINA 1999). Surely an example of the global environment for education.

Fitting it all in

The question “how do we fit it all in?” usually arises here. I prefer to rephrase the question: For the sake of our students, can we afford not to introduce these new skills? It can be done, but it requires educators to work smarter and to adopt these new skills themselves. Remember, more is caught than taught. We need to move from being the sage on the stage in a “chalk and talk” teaching environment to a place where educators are more like the coach on the sideline. We need to become more like mentors with a degree in humility, because we educators no longer possess all the knowledge. Félix Gutiérrez, a

former journalism professor, is executive director of the Freedom Forum's Pacific Coast Center. At the 1999 Technology Conference for Educators, which the Freedom Forum hosted in San Francisco, Gutiérrez recalled "the glory days" of being a professor when you could count on the teacher for three things:

- 1 Having the knowledge.
- 2 Teaching in a structured way.
- 3 Evaluating how well the student learned the material.

Said Gutiérrez: "The student came in saying 'I need to know and I'll learn it your way since you have the knowledge, and I'll do the work your way for you to evaluate'." But the situation has changed markedly because:

Technologies are changing rapidly, and there is a gap between campus and the workplace — and the campus is lagging behind. Students come to class with different technological knowledge obtained in different ways. A certain level of knowledge or lack of knowledge among your students cannot be assumed. And students may know something the faculty doesn't. That flips the dynamic. The way media are produced and the way people are using them are changing (Gutiérrez 1999).

Technologies are changing so quickly that there is a widening gap between the university, with its one or three-year technology replacement cycles, and the workplace, where money is more readily available for the latest gear. But universities should not use outdated technology as an excuse not to teach new media skills. Low-end technologies such as getting students to produce email newsletters still provides students with the chance to experience making new media products. In many cases, an email newsletter costs less than producing a paper-based student newspaper. Web publishing is relatively inexpensive because much of the software can be found free on the Web. The Internet is the future, and computer-assisted reporting (CAR) one major aspect of that future. The cover story of the March/April edition of the *Columbia Journalism Review* pointed out that the digital reporting revolution was "reaching warp speed" Simon and

Napolitano reported that CAR was the vital skill to acquire. The future belonged to reporters “who become more and more computer literate” (1999 p.26).

Postgraduate journalism?

Should journalism be offered at postgraduate level? The answer is yes and no. For some types of journalism — community newspapers, say, or newsletter production — a three-year degree may be sufficient. But for a journalist wanting to work on a metropolitan daily, or seeking to specialise in an intellectually-demanding round, then they need education at postgraduate level. That is, they should do a general degree in something related to their specialisation — such as economics, law, politics or science — and then do a postgraduate diploma or masterate in journalism. Given that the time commitment for both is roughly the same, students are probably better off doing a masterate. Postgraduate programs will blossom in the coming decade as under-educated journalists realise that they need more specialised knowledge. The future in education belongs to universities that can offer those courses, probably online.

The key issue is educators’ willingness to grasp the nettle of opportunity in the digital revolution. It is not a case of whether we should — we must; otherwise we cheat our students. A better-educated journalism workforce must be our aim for the next millennium.

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Pacific newsrooms and the campus: some comparisons between Fiji and Papua New Guinea

David Robie

Most South Pacific journalists are living and working in either the Fiji Islands or Papua New Guinea. All three of the region's university education and training programs are also situated in these two countries. One institution in Papua New Guinea has educated a generation of Pacific journalists while university education is relatively new for journalists in Fiji and the smaller nations of Polynesia, where donor-funded short courses have been relied on for training. Politicians have lambasted what they describe as a lack of professionalism and training among Pacific Islands journalists. The University of the South Pacific introduced professional media attachments with Fiji news media for the first time during 1998. This paper examines the findings of a survey of 12 news media organisations in Fiji and Papua New Guinea during December 1998 – February 1999. It found a marked difference — journalists from Fiji are far less qualified, much younger and less experienced than in Papua New Guinea.

The quality and lack of professional formation of journalism practitioners in the South Pacific has been a frequent theme of criticism for politicians in the region (Robie, 1998:115-118). While the majority of journalists in Papua New Guinea do have formal training and qualifications (Layton, 1995; Robie, 1995, 1997), this is not the case in much of the rest of the region, including Fiji where newsroom staff have traditionally been school-leavers with little or no experience. Many news organisations rely on donor-funded short courses coordinated through organisations such as the Pacific Islands

News Association (PINA) and Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association (PIBA) in association with AusAID (A\$3 million Pacific Media Initiative), UNESCO, Commonwealth Press Union and others. It is questionable how well such short courses have served the region and whether they have really contributed to the long-term sustainability of journalism professionalism. Some even see the anomalies as “flawed” or “embarrassing” (Sorariba 1997; Hooper 1998). Other critics have the view that many training initiatives are “symptomatic of a failure of leadership among those in the Pacific, as well as those from donor nations, who lead the stampede to the trough of development aid dollars” (Hooper 1998, p.13).

Since the May 1999 general election in the Fiji Islands, when Mahendra Chaudhry was elected in a landslide victory as the country's first Indo-Fijian prime minister, the local news media have faced sustained criticism for alleged lack of professionalism and ethics, and poor training standards (Robie 1999a; Vayeshnoi 1999a, 1999b; Chaudhry 1999). In paid advertisements in two of the national daily newspapers, the new *Fiji Sun* and the Government-owned *Daily Post*, Chaudhry's administration condemned news media “hysteria” and accused the major Rupert Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* of “fanning the fires of sedition and racism”. (*Daily Post, Fiji Sun*; 1999) Warning that the news media faced a media tribunal and legislation if it did not get its house in order, Chaudhry declared the media must work under the “ambit” of the *Public Order Act*, which “prohibits public statements and utterances which could incite” (Chaudhry 1999, p.7). He accused “irresponsible elements” in the news media of turning a continuing debate over the renewal of leases of land belonging to indigenous Fijians into a racial issue. The leases, which are running out, are mainly held by farmers who are descendants of indentured labourers brought from India last century when Fiji was a British colony. Chaudhry is descended from these Indians. He was in a new Fiji Labour Party-led Government removed by the mainly indigenous Fijian army in May 1987 in a bloodless coup after protests by indigenous Fijians against what they claimed was an Indian-dominated government. (In fact, the deposed Fiji Labour Party/National Federation Party coalition

Government was racially balanced with seven indigenous Fijian cabinet ministers, including Prime Minister Dr Timoci Bavadra, seven Indo-Fijian ministers, and one mixed-race minister.)

A few days before the Government advertisements were published on 30 October, Chaudhry had stunned the news media industry with a strong attack on the media while launching the Fiji Media Council's self-regulatory *General Code of Ethics and Practice* (1999). He singled out the *Fiji Times*, *Islands Business* news magazine and Fiji Television Ltd, and to a lesser extent the *Fiji Sun*, for scathing criticism. Chaudhry also named individual journalists, including the *Fiji Times*' political reporter Margaret Wise and *Islands Business* publisher Robert Keith-Reid. Citing examples of where journalism integrity was perceived to be eroding in the United States and other countries, Chaudhry said:

There is no doubt that media credibility is dropping. The public is becoming critical of media practices and its self-adopted watchdog role. The industry needs critical self-appraisal and a rethink of whither it is headed.

Fiji is not isolated from these developments. The media in Fiji also needs to take stock of how it is behaving and whether it is facing a crisis of ethics. Since taking office, my Government has had occasion to be extremely disgusted by the antics of some elements in the media who have used the medium of the newspaper and television to further their own personal agendas to discredit the Government (Chaudhry p.4).

Part of Chaudhry's speech dealt with general training and professional standards:

Ethics, professionalism, standards and training — these are key elements of the industry that need serious attention. Failure to address these issues has put the integrity of the entire [Fiji] industry in question.

It is the duty of media organisations to ensure local journalists are trained to acceptable standards . . . Government is prepared to draw on its resources and provide assistance in facilitating this.

Government is working on changes to the Media Act and the industry can rest assured that it will be fully consulted on this. We intend to give the Media Council teeth to impose fines where it finds the media code of ethics has been breached by media organisations (Chaudhry p.12).

Chaudhry went on to outline proposed changes to the *Newspaper Registration Act* which would include an amendment with “appropriate penalties” for infringing the proposed *Media Act*. To deal with defamation cases where members of the public have been “personally injured, maliciously or unfairly,” by news media, or the target of “character assassination”, the Government was considering establishing a Media Tribunal for “swift justice”.

In Papua New Guinea, then Prime Minister Bill Skate told a week-long World Press Freedom Day seminar in May 1999 that he supported press freedom, but promptly launched into a strong criticism of standards:

When I watch the television and I see a person making claims against another person, and the television station plays the story without seeking comments to balance the story, I feel sad for the media of my nation. Perhaps the problem with this style of reporting is lack of training by the companies [which] own our media outlets.

It disappoints me when I see foreign companies which own media outlets in Papua New Guinea ignore media and journalism development in our country. These companies earn money from our nation but do not put sufficient money back into training and developing our journalists.

I am calling on Channel Nine in Australia to help your television station [EMTV] in Papua New Guinea by providing real training for your journalists (Skate 1999).

Trends and dilemmas in the Pacific newsroom

This Pacific newsroom research grew out of questions about an apparent difference in attitude between the media industries in both Papua New Guinea and Fiji towards journalism education and training. Both nations have a similar sized news media industry, but in Papua New Guinea newsroom attachments for journalism students have been established for almost 25 years. The future of this system is now under question following the planned closure during 1999 of the University of Papua New Guinea journalism program, the pioneering institution in journalism education in the Pacific. Another institution, Divine Word University’s communication arts program in Madang, is attempting to

expand its courses to absorb the journalism students from UPNG but, being remote from the centre of national news media, has a less developed attachment scheme.

Papua New Guinea has two national daily newspapers, the Murdoch-owned *Post-Courier*¹ and the Malaysian-owned *National*, which have the largest circulations in the Pacific. It also has two national weeklies, the *Independent* (formerly the *Times* of PNG) and the Pidgin language *Wantok*, owned by the nation's major churches, and a fortnightly provincial newspaper, the *Eastern Star*. The major broadcasters are EMTV, which has a footprint from the Philippines to Tonga and is wholly owned by Australia's Channel Nine; the private NauFM radio group, managed by Communications (Fiji) Ltd; and state-run National Broadcasting Corporation. All major news media have Internet websites.

Fiji has a much better developed magazine industry with four major monthly or bimonthly news magazine groups, *Islands Business International*, *Pacific Islands Monthly* (Murdoch), *The Review* and *Fiji First*. The three daily newspapers are the Murdoch-owned *Fiji Times* and the struggling Fiji-government owned *Daily Post*, with a third daily, the *Fiji Sun*, which was launched in September 1999. Broadcasters are Fiji Television; the private Communications (Fiji) Ltd (FM96) group, which began broadcasting in the year of the military coups; and the corporatised Island Networks Corporation Ltd (previously the Fiji Broadcasting Commission). The *Daily Post*, Island Networks and *The Review* news magazine share a website, *FijiLive*, while the *Fiji Times* is still establishing a website of its own.

'Bringing culprits to justice': the survey

A newsroom training survey was conducted in both countries between 14 December 1998 and 28 February 1999 with personal visits by the author to newsrooms with questionnaires. Twelve news organisations were surveyed in this way with a thirteenth company declining to participate. The response rate (Table 1) ranged between 42 percent at one newspaper in Fiji and 100 percent at a radio broadcaster in Papua New Guinea. Overall, the participation rate in

this survey was far higher in Papua New Guinea (76 percent of total staff) than in Fiji (57 percent). But the final sample number of 124 with completed questionnaires are comparable, comprising 59 respondents from Fiji and 65 from Papua New Guinea.²

Table 1: Comparison of response level between media organisations

Media group*	Fiji		PNG	
Fiji Times	16	42%		
Daily Post	11	69%		
Communications (Fiji)	10	67%		
Fiji Broadcasting Corp	9	50%		
Fiji Television	5	83%		
The Review	8	80%		
Post-Courier			17	81%
The National			14	74%
Word Publishing			10	77%
National Broadcasting Corp			11	65%
PNGFM Pty Ltd			9	100%
EMTV			4	67%
Total:	59 (57%)		65 (76%)	

* The new *Fiji Sun* had not begun publishing when this survey was conducted; Islands Business International, with approximately five journalists on its staff, declined to participate.

The Fiji and Papua New Guinea samples are both balanced in gender (Table 2): 51 percent men and 49 percent women in Fiji, while Papua New Guinea had a slight majority of women (52 percent) over men (48 percent). This compared with journalism student balances at UPNG, where two-thirds were women, and the University of the South Pacific, where the balance was 35 women and 28 men.

Table 2: Media gender balance

Gender	Fiji (n=59)		PNG (n=65)	
Men	30	51%	31	48%
Women	29	49%	34	52%
Median age	22		29	

The median age of journalists in the Fiji survey was 22, ranging between the youngest at 18 and the oldest at 50. There was also a large bulge in the 21-25 age group. In Papua New Guinea, the median age was 29, ranging between 20 and 50. Also, the ages of PNG journalists were spread more evenly across the range.

Papua New Guinean journalists were found to be the most qualified with 73 percent having completed formal tertiary qualifications (Table 3), contrasting with 14 percent in Fiji. The Fiji figure represents a fall since the last survey seven years ago, in 1992, when Layton (1995) found 16 percent. Although the new journalism course at USP started providing graduates for the media workforce in 1996 (28 region-wide, including nine at the end of 1999, in the past four years, and a further 30 expected in 2000), and there also is a growing tendency of Fiji journalists to gain degrees abroad, these trends have not yet shown significantly in the statistics. The PNG figure was an increase over the 68 percent of tertiary qualified journalists recorded by Layton in her survey. But an earlier survey in 1984, which focused on the National Broadcasting Commission (Phinney 1985), showed the figure had been even higher in Papua New Guinea, at 76 percent. However, the more recent statistics would include a higher proportion of degrees to undergraduate diplomas.

When breaking down the tertiary qualifications into the actual degrees, Papua New Guinea and Fiji both had one masters degree in the survey; 14 percent in PNG had degrees (Fiji, 5 percent) and 57 percent in PNG at least had undergraduate diplomas (Fiji, 7 percent). Fiji's strength was shown in industry certificates (14 percent) whereas Papua New Guinea had none in this category. Also, 25 percent of journalists in Fiji had completed non-formal short courses while only

17 percent of journalists in Papua New Guinea had done any. However, while almost half of Fiji's journalists in the sample (47 percent) had no qualifications at all, barely 12 percent of PNG journalists fell into this category.

Table 3: Highest qualifications of journalists

Tertiary qualifications	Fiji (n=59)		PNG (n=65)	
a. Postgraduate degree	1	2%	1	2%
b. Undergraduate degree	3	5%	9	14%
c. Undergraduate diploma	4	7%	37	57%
Total a, b and c:	8	14%	47	73%
Industry certificates*	8	14%	0	0
Short courses**	15	25%	10	15%
No qualifications	28	47%	8	12%
Experience median	2.5 years		5.2 years	

* e.g. FIMA certificate, polytech 32-week certificates etc.

** Such as organised by PINA or its affiliates.

On attitudes to education and training, journalists in Fiji (80 percent) and Papua New Guinea (89 percent) were reasonably matched with desiring a combination of both tertiary journalism programs and in-house cadetships (Table 4). However, while a higher group of journalists in PNG favoured tertiary programs alone (9 percent) as against 5 percent in Fiji, it was the reverse in Fiji with 15 percent favouring an in-house cadetship compared with just 2 percent in PNG.

Qualitative comments indicated a high level of hostility among some journalists in Fiji towards university journalism courses. None of the respondents with such views actually had tertiary qualifications themselves, and none appeared to have attended any university course or program. One young newspaper journalist said prospective journalists should do a degree in something else other than journalism, such as economics. Another said "journalism is a profession that cannot be taught in a classroom". A third added: "I think these days graduates

just think if they have the qualifications, that's it — they are journalists". A 32-year-old editor said graduates had "attitudes which cannot be changed [and] this affects other staff", but was not more specific. He urged: "Scrap all university journalism courses!" But some journalists differ. One young staffer at the *Fiji Times* said:

Our journalists are too generalised — they misreport, misquote people, [are] unbalanced, [give] wrong spellings, and other basic reporting skills are lacking. If we had a combination of [in-house and university] training, maybe the standard of journalism would improve.

The negative attitudes appeared to reflect an insecurity towards graduates as they join the media workforce and in some cases were promoted rapidly or gained relatively high-paying jobs. One graduate in early 1999 became a features, then business, editor of a daily newspaper within three months of graduating. Another, a 20-year-old graduate, was recruited as a publications officer for a non-government organisation on a salary of F\$30,000 — or roughly four times more than the average starting salary for a journalist on a local media organisation.

Table 4: Journalists' opinions about their type of training

Preferred choice	Fiji (n=59)		PNG (n=65)	
Tertiary journalism school	3	5%	6	9%
In-house cadetship training	9	15%	1	2%
Combination of both	47	80%	58	89%

* Respondents were asked the question: How should journalists be trained? They were given the above choices and a provision for comments.

The major education institution represented by journalists with qualifications was the University of Papua New Guinea with 32 graduates in the news media workplace, including several editors, followed by 18 graduates from Divine Word University in Madang, PNG. In Fiji, just four USP graduates were recorded although a new batch of a dozen graduates in the region were not reflected in this survey.

Journalists were questioned on their perceptions of their media role to test their notions of news values in contrast to definitions widely used by politicians, particularly those stressing the need for “development journalism” (MacBride 1980; Hester 1987a; Loo 1994). A selection of five key words or phrases, drawn from “four worlds news theories” models widely taught in the Pacific³, were used as core options along with further open selections (Hester 1987b, 1987c; Lule 1987; Robie 1995; Romano 1999). The keywords or phrases were: watchdog, agent of empowerment, nation-building, or defender of truth. Journalists in Fiji had a far different view than their counterparts from Papua New Guinea on their perceived media role in the community (Table 5). Significantly more journalists in Fiji (63 percent) than in PNG (46 percent) favoured the western “watchdog” model as the preferred role. However, it was clear that Papua New Guinea journalists had a more complex view of their role, which generally included watchdog along with other variations. More than double the number of journalists in Papua New Guinea (37 percent) than in Fiji (15 percent), for example, saw the role of the news media as the “defender of truth”. Also, 12 percent of PNG journalists saw the public “empowerment” model as important, compared with just seven percent in Fiji. Journalists in PNG (25 percent) were also more likely to see the media as a “nation builder” than in Fiji (17 percent). Some journalists commented on the value of workplace attachments while studying.⁴

Table 5: Journalists’ views about their professional roles

Perceived Role	Fiji (n=59)		PNG (n=65)	
Watchdog	37	63%	30	46%
Agent of empowerment	4	7%	8	12%
Nation building	10	17%	16	25%
Defender of truth	9	15%	24	37%
Other roles	4	7%	5	8%
No answers	7	12%	1	2%

* Some respondents provided multiple answers with rankings.

The findings compared interestingly with a survey in Indonesia (Romano, 1999:75), which shares a common frontier with Papua New Guinea through its disputed province of Irian Jaya (West Papua). This contrasted notions of “watchdogs and *Pancasila* pussycats”, or variations of the development journalism philosophy based on Indonesia’s *Pancasila* press model. In Romano’s survey, 51 percent of the sample regarded the watchdog notion as most important, even though this term may not have been used as a preferred description. This was significantly lower than in Fiji, but higher than in the Papua New Guinea survey. However, 22 percent in the Indonesian sample saw the media’s chief role as an agent of empowerment — double the percentage in the Papua New Guinea and triple that of Fiji. In terms of nation-building, Papua New Guineans were more likely to see this as their role (25 percent) than in Indonesia (19 percent) and Fiji (17 percent). But Indonesia (8 percent) compared closely with Fiji (7 percent) when considering the notion of defender of the truth. This contrasted with PNG (37 percent). Romano’s survey had an additional category not contained in the two-nation Pacific survey — “entertainment”. But of the overall seven percent who nominated “other roles”, none included entertainment as an option, surprisingly as all Fiji and Papua New Guinea newspapers, at least, strongly feature entertainment and lifestyle coverage.

In the qualitative findings, there was a marked difference between the Papua New Guinea and Fiji samples. A far higher percentage of Fiji respondents did not provide answers (12 percent), whereas only two percent of PNG journalists did not respond. The Fiji non responses apparently had a correlation with those journalists who had no formal journalism education.

Many Papua New Guinea respondents saw a direct relationship between the watchdog and nation-building roles, and this was most marked with journalists working for the national broadcaster NBC. According to one journalist:

Especially in a developing nation, while we act as a watchdog we must also be mindful of our responsibility in nation-building. Exposing the truth and investigating the stories must be done without any bias. This is part of nation-building, leading a country to be more accountable to its people.

And another:

One of the most crucial roles of a news media organisation is in nation-building. Through many economic and social development stories encouraging people in their country to be self-reliant and productive, the media encourage them to be self-reliant and productive. They encourage them to start grassroots small business activities to improve the country's economy and the standard of living and they support and promote people to love, respect and become responsible citizens of their respective countries. It is through these and many other efforts of the organisation [that] nation-building is encouraged to develop a nation.

But such views were not restricted to the state-run radio. According to a journalist on the leading daily newspaper, *Post-Courier*:

News media organisations in PNG seem to be focused on being watchdogs, reporting on what is happening. But I believe [they] have a wider role and that is to be an agent for change. Papua New Guinea is a developing country which does not have the financial resources needed for development such as health programs etc., but established media, including radio, can be used to bring vital information to people to reinforce positive changes.

One journalist on the Malaysian-owned *The National*, one of Papua New Guinea's few to have a postgraduate qualification, said:

As opposed to the "gutter press", PNG journalism is centred around the philosophy of development journalism, meaning that what is reported must have significance to growth, development and the aspiration of PNG as a sovereign state and its citizens. The powerful élite are right sometimes, so are the people at other times. PNG takes the middle [road] to promote/defend the truth for the betterment and advancement of all. In so doing, PNG media will truly serve its purpose as a defender of truth, a watchdog and an agent of development.

Some journalists were acutely aware of the personal responsibility they carried, one saying her role was "challenging — and we actually make or break the nation [because of] whether we are accurate or not". Another said: "I am the teller of the story of life with the elemental things that are important to men and women. I give the

information which my audience most needs to get along in their daily existence . . . The message I bring is often the glue which holds society together.”

Respondents in Fiji appeared to be less philosophical about their roles. In fact, many, especially those who had no formal foundation in journalism theory, seemed unclear about the alternative notions presented. But many still had a robust view of their role. Said one television journalist:

Corruption tends to be rife in Pacific countries like Fiji and Papua New Guinea. As a watchdog, the role is clearly defined but resources or training, or lack of them, limit the inroads we can make into corruption and the strides needed to be a watchdog in other areas in the public spotlight.

A journalist working for the national broadcaster FBC said:

We best serve the community by disclosing the truth and the mysteries which are normally kept hidden away. With well-researched written reports, this will foster a more pro-active community, able to contribute more effectively to national development.

Some journalists in Fiji did share the common concern felt in Papua New Guinea about the wider roles in relation to the watchdog. As another state broadcast journalist said: “In fact, nation-building and watchdog would be the two roles I believe suit the work we do. We can’t be just watchdogs of society if we cannot promote prosperity and harmony in society. Negative reporting is not always healthy.” According to a senior reporter on a business magazine renowned for its ferret-like investigations:

Being a watchdog will also mean being a good journalist — one that is willing to take risks in digging things out but this could also mean having good contacts in the upper echelon of any government. I guess being a watchdog will subsequently make a person or an organisation an agent of empowerment and so playing a crucial role in nation-building. A watchdog for me personally is a person or organisation which takes on the responsibility of ensuring that the government as a whole, or any individual, or even a non-government organisation, does not abuse public funds, is not corrupt in any way . . . and takes on the role of exposing them to ensure justice.

Many respondents felt that while they were monitoring the government and the leaders, they should not forget to be the “eyes and ears of the people they serve”. It was important that media helped “weed out incidents which bring hardship to the people”. It was, after all, the media that brought “culprits to justice”.

Conclusion

Media technology and social changes in the South Pacific, as elsewhere in the world, are so rapid that the region needs major changes to its approach to journalism training and education. The system of donor-funded short courses that has tended to provide the core of training in the region, apart from Papua New Guinea where university journalism education has been the norm for more than two decades, is limited and frequently is little more than a band-aid solution to the challenges. An ideal neophyte journalist in the Pacific for the future is one with analytical skills, exposure to cultural and political dilemmas in other countries in the region, a broad knowledge in communication and other disciplines, and high expressiveness and multi-skilling in several media.

Journalism graduates who develop with the ability to identify, analyse and solve problems will be of great benefit to the region’s news media. They will have the capacity to adapt to the constantly changing demands in their careers. They will also have the eagerness and curiosity to become better lifetime learners and an asset to their media organisations undergoing change.

However, this survey has revealed a serious gap between the needs of the Pacific media and the future and the mindset of many journalists in the industry today. It has also underscored some fundamental differences between the news media in Fiji and Papua New Guinea. While politicians in both countries lament the lack of standards and professionalism, the survey has shown particular shortcomings in the media industry, in Fiji at least. While Papua New Guinea can be reasonably satisfied with its relatively high level of journalists with formal tertiary qualifications (73 percent), Fiji might well question why only 14 percent of its journalists are similarly qualified. And this appears

to have been a slight decline over the past decade in spite of the emerging new tertiary journalism program at USP. Papua New Guinean journalists also have a significant edge over Fiji in terms of age and experience.

In Fiji, there seems to be concern over a negative view in some media organisations towards university education and training for journalists. In fact, there is a prevalent attitude on at least two organisations, in spite of all the media industry hype about journalism training, that it would be better to maintain the status quo. One probable explanation for this is that as more degree-holders enter the media industry they will force higher starting salaries. This view is in contrast with other Pacific countries, such as the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, where media organisations are actively encouraging their staff to go to Laucala campus to gain journalism qualifications. It is also in contrast with other Fiji news media organisations which have prided themselves in employing graduates and have sought to achieve higher educational standards across the newsroom.

The survey also shows a more sophisticated grasp among Papua New Guinea journalists of the role of news media in developing societies. Journalists have been taught to take an adversarial role as a watchdog and have frequently exposed bad government and corruption in the Pacific. But when the watchdog is combined with a business-owned media, reporting frequently turns into an aggressive, cynical, self-serving and titillating banter, as has recently been the case in Fiji. Many Papua New Guinea journalists seem well aware of this additional challenge to their role — being a watchdog alone is not enough. It is also important to seek solutions. This awareness appears linked to the formal journalism education foundation that most have experienced. As one survey journalist observed, the media is “often the glue which holds society together”.

Notes

1. The *Post-Courier*, owned by a Murdoch News Ltd subsidiary, South Pacific Post Pty Ltd, has set an example in the Pacific for supporting media training. Since 1993, it has given an annual financial grant of K5000 each to the

University of Papua New Guinea and Divine Word University journalism schools to purchase computers and equipment. In recent years, the focus of the grant was changed to assistance in kind with the *Post-Courier* printing the fortnightly UPNG training newspaper *Uni Tavur* (since 1995, when it won the JEA Ossie Award for best student newspaper in Australia, NZ and the Pacific). The company is also now printing the quarterly DWU student newsletter, *Dimai*.

2. Some of the author's preliminary findings were presented at the First Oceania Regional Conference, World Association of Press Councils, Brisbane, 22-23 June 1999. Some statistics in that presentation have been revised for this paper.
3. This includes "fourth world", or indigenous minority news values, as typified by Bougainville within the Papua New Guinea state, Guadalcanal dissidents within the Solomon Islands; and Kanak radio stations within New Caledonia.
4. The University of the South Pacific followed the lead set by the University of Papua New Guinea (Robie, 1997) two decades earlier by establishing a system of professional media attachments with media organisations, starting in the second semester 1998. However, there are significant differences between the USP and UPNG models. The UPNG course structure provides for courses of varied weighting, depending on the content. Production journalism courses carry a higher weighting than for classroom only theoretical courses. Thus the final year News Practice, a 16-week full-time attachment with a daily news media organisation, is equivalent to the normal semester load of four courses.

Such a system does not apply at USP so a compromise was reached. Final year journalism students complete the course Journalism Production in which they undertake a formal attachment (six weeks full-time) with a daily news media organisation in Fiji. They also complete a project such as producing a major print/online publication or radio/television documentary (equivalent to four weeks full-time during the final year). So far 22 students have completed this attachment provision with just one failure, and while students consider the scheme a major boost to their professional ability and confidence, news editors and directors welcome the opportunity to work with the students directly. And the students are usually offered a job at the end of the attachment. They are also required to produce an analytical report on their experience, both written and presented orally as a workshop with other students. Although the

attachments were not directly considered as part of the survey, it is interesting to note some of the observations of students. According to one graduate from the Solomon Islands:

The attachment is an absolutely brilliant idea, but the training provided by the local [Fiji] media industry did not complement the advanced skills and knowledge we got from the USP program. The gap is too wide in terms of technology and knowledge offered.

Another who worked in television:

Working for the training newspaper *Wansolwara* and Radio Pacific is a good start but students need to experience the daily deadline in the afternoons or evenings. I think students shouldn't wait until the "attachment" period to get this experience. Although I met the deadlines, I also had to adjust to the television way of writing. The attachment is an excellent idea so that students can show their talents.

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Appendix: Journalism at USP

One of only two regional universities in the world, the University of the South Pacific is owned and operated by 12 countries. It has three campuses and five schools in the Fiji Islands, Samoa and Vanuatu, seven institutes, the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, and the Centre for Development Studies, and through its regional centres maintains an active presence in all member countries. It has 9515 enrolled students with 54 percent of them studying through distance learning (extension) study programs. The other regional university is the University of the West Indies. USP's 12 member countries and territories are: Cook Islands, Fiji Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Marshall Islands, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. The total equivalent full-time students (EFTS) is 5762 and the EFTS percentage studying through extension is 37 percent. The Report of the Vice-Chancellor of the University of the South Pacific to the University Council, May 1999.

The university has a unique regional communications network established in 1974 for the development of extension studies. It is now currently spending almost F\$11 million in aid funds from Australia, New Zealand and Japan and more than \$2 million of its own funds to upgrade the network as the USPNet 2000 regional dedicated VSAT satellite communications and teaching system (Heads, 1999). The university will own and operate this private network which will be the largest outside the operators of national telecommunications services in the Pacific. It is due to come into operation at the start of the academic year in 2000. For USP's distant students, the new system will provide:

- opportunities for audio and video tutorials;
- communications by "local" telephone, fax or email between academic staff and students;

- live video transmission of a lecture from any of the campuses in three countries
- video conferences or tutoring between the 12 countries and the main Laucala campus in Suva;
- regional communication possibilities for the student-owned campus FM station Radio Pasifik and television training.

The journalism program in the School of Humanities is relatively new. Founded in 1994 with French Government aid funds, the program has a three-year BA degree double majoring in journalism plus a second discipline, and a new two-year diploma option. This followed an earlier journalism certificate course at USP which was established with Commonwealth Fund for Technical Cooperation assistance in the mid-1980s but later foundered. During 1999, the USP program replaced the 25-year-old University of Papua New Guinea program as the major regional one after establishing a system of professional media attachments the previous year. The original USP certificate course was pioneered by journalism educator Dr Murray Masterton. However, although it was also situated in the Literature and Language Department, it has no curriculum or institutional connection with the present degree and diploma journalism program (Hooper 1998 & Masterton [2x] 1988). In February 1999, the University Council of UPNG announced it was closing the journalism program along with the Faculties of Creative Arts and Allied Health in a controversial restructuring move (Yakai 1999).

Currently, the USP journalism program has 63 enrolled journalism students, after more than doubling in size in 1998. It includes six practitioners taking the Pacific diploma (all working journalists or information officers from the Fiji Islands), and 57 from eight Pacific and Indian Ocean countries studying the degree program. The educational philosophy and pedagogy has a “liberating” model focused on far-reaching future media and social changes in the Pacific (Freire 1970; Masterton 1988). The program employs a goal-oriented, problem-solving and project-based pedagogy with an emphasis on theory integrated with professional journalism production outcomes (Freire, 1970; Chan, 1996; Hooper, 1998). It publishes and broadcasts:

- two training newspapers, *Wansolwara* and *Spicol Daily* (published daily for one week each year, inside a national daily newspaper);
- the first media training and resource website in the region, *Pacific Journalism Online* <<http://www.usp.ac.fj/journ/>>;
- the news service for Radio Pasifik; an FM station based on campus;

- television news reports and documentaries in partnership with the Secretariat of the Pacific Community (SPC) on Pacific Way on the region's television stations.

So far, 17 journalists have graduated from the university in the new program with a BA degree in journalism and two in the new industry-based Diploma in Pacific Journalism. Thirteen graduated in 1998 (including two with the Diploma in Pacific Journalism), 3 in 1997, and 3 in 1996. Nine graduated in 1999 and more than 30 are expected to graduate in 2000. Twelve of these regional journalism students were from the Fiji Islands, two from the Federated States of Micronesia, two from Vanuatu, one from Samoa, one from the Solomon Islands and one from French Polynesia. All but four of the graduates quickly took jobs in the news media or related industries. Three of the remainder took teaching positions because of the higher salary scales while a fourth was early in 1999 attached to the Journalism Program studying for a masters degree in development studies, but in September joined the new *Fiji Sun* daily newspaper. The program also hosted another Masters student from the Auckland University of Technology who was doing a thesis on national development and the May 1999 Fiji general election. The program has proposed postgraduate journalism courses beginning in the year 2000.

In 1998, one journalism student won gold medals as the best student in the history/politics department in the School of Social and Economic Development and also the best student in the School of Humanities. Unfortunately, he did not win the gold medal in journalism because there was none for this new program. This was rectified for 1999, but there was no winner. However, the media industry and related sponsors supported an inaugural journalism awards ceremony which recognised outstanding journalism ranging from best investigative story to best contribution to regional journalism. The sponsors included Pacific Islands Broadcasting Association (PIBA), *The Review* news magazine, Fiji Television Ltd, *Daily Post* newspaper and the Caines Jannif photosupplies company.

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News media chronicle, July 1998 to June 1999

Rod Kirkpatrick

The developing technologies of pay television and the Internet plus planning for digital television provided the backdrop for the national debate on cross-media ownership rules to be revisited. The debate was continuing at the end of the 12 months under review, for the Productivity Commission was inquiring into media ownership rules, content regulations, licence fees and the impending switch from analogue to digital technologies. Some media proprietors were suggesting the new technologies were making the old laws obsolete.

At John Fairfax Holdings, another year, another chief executive. Bob Muscat became the third Fairfax CEO in three years to resign. Editor John Lyons departed — “sacked” or otherwise, depending on your source. And there was an exodus of other key Fairfax editorial personnel to *The Bulletin* in the wake of Max Walsh’s departure to become editor-in-chief. The major shareholder, Brierley Investments Ltd, sold its 24.4 percent stake in Fairfax, leaving the ownership of Fairfax almost as indistinct as the Herald and Weekly Times Ltd was before News Ltd took over the group. The Australian Broadcasting Authority found that the interests held by Brian Powers (chairman) and Kerry Packer did not breach cross-media ownership rules.

It could be loosely said that during the year Rupert Murdoch buried his first wife, divorced his second and married his third. This raised complicated questions of dynastic succession that had previously seemed to be fairly straightforward. Lachlan Murdoch also married.

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation fielded about two letters a week from the Minister for Communications, Senator Richard Alston, during his first two years in office. Documents show most of the letters deal with public complaints about programming that has

offended for one reason or another. The Coalition lodged 17 formal complaints during the Federal election campaign about ABC news and current affairs coverage. (Kerry Philip Green contributes the section on the Internet.)

ABC

The former *60 Minutes* interviewer and *A Current Affair* host, Jana Wendt, began the year as a controversial compere/interviewer on ABC-TV and finished the year in a similar role at SBS. The ABC screened *Uncensored*, Wendt's ten-part, \$1.1 million series, which began on 8 July with her interview with Toni Morrison, the American Nobel and Pulitzer prize-winning novelist. Mid-term, the series drew strong criticism from the ABC's *Media Watch*, with Richard Ackland accusing Wendt of being overpaid and overhyped, and suggesting that her program had not delivered on its promise. Wendt said Ackland's criticism had little to do with *Uncensored's* content and "everything to do with an internal ABC battle" about the outsourcing of production. Writing in the *SMH* she said *Media Watch* was worthless if it could not "conform to the standards it demanded of others". The ABC disclosed that four of the 10 interviewees on *Uncensored* were paid to appear. By year's end, Wendt was the host of a revamped *Dateline* on SBS Television. So sensitive had she become to "belligerent" journalists that she was highly selective about whom she would talk to when her appointment was announced. *Dateline* was switched from 7.30pm Saturdays to 8.30pm Wednesdays and Wendt's first program appeared on 16 June 1999. Errol Simper caned it in *The Australian* the next morning. The previous host of *Dateline*, Helen Vatsikopoulos, lost her role while she was on maternity leave.

Documents obtained by the *Sydney Morning Herald* (*SMH*) in July showed that in his two years as Minister for Communication, Senator Richard Alston, had written more than 180 letters to the ABC, with 83 percent of them dealing with public complaints about offensive, lewd or unsatisfactory programming. By far the maggest proportion of complaints — 29 percent — concerned the ABC's broadcasts of the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. The broadcasts began in

1994 and ended in 1997. The next biggest group (16pc) involved offensive language on ABC radio's Triple J youth network. Less than 8 percent of the Minister's letters related to the political bias that he and other ministers had said afflicted the ABC.

During the September-October 1998 federal election campaign the Coalition made 17 formal complaints to the ABC of bias and unfair treatment. Documents obtained by the *SMH* under a Freedom of Information request revealed that during the election the Liberal Party sent up to two letters a day alleging that Liberal candidates, including the Prime Minister, were receiving unequal treatment from the ABC. The Australian Labor Party, the Greens and One Nation each complained only once. The Liberal Party's campaign director, Lynton Crosby, wrote 10 letters to the ABC's managing director, Brian Johns, demanding urgent responses, apologies, and corrective actions. The Prime Minister, John Howard, openly accused the ABC of bias. Michael Kroger, an ABC board member and the president of the Victorian Liberal Party from 1987-92, joined in the attack on the ABC. Johns described the Coalition's accusations as an unprecedented attack on the national broadcaster.

The chairman of the ABC, Donald McDonald, incensed his own staff when he gave a ringing public endorsement for John Howard at a Liberal Party fund-raising lunch on 23 September during the federal election campaign. The ABC staff went on a union-organised strike, demanding McDonald resign for a "blatant and injudicious public breach of the ABC's political independence". The *SMH* suggested that even to have attended "this highly political event was unwise". When the ABC board next met, a few days before the election, note-takers and staff were sent from the room for a period while the other directors spoke with their chairman. No statement was issued and nobody would comment.

A few weeks after the Howard Government was re-elected, the Government announced it would fund the ABC's entry into digital television by making good any deficit in the \$44 million it would cost for the first stage. The Government, however, expected any money raised by the ABC from property sales, such as the Gore Hill (Sydney)

site, to be put towards the cost of digital television. McDonald himself criticised his own staff at an Asia Society lunch in Sydney. He mentioned the “disturbing” ignorance displayed in an ABC radio report on Malaysia and said a former federal minister had attacked him about the ABC’s “very unbalanced” reporting on Asia in general.

The final early edition of *PM* was broadcast on ABC radio on 18 December. The 10-minute edition, which used to go to air at 4.05pm, was discontinued after managers of the ABC’s 57 State and regional radio stations had decided against continuing to take it. The early edition began during the Gulf War in 1991. The hour-long edition of *PM* at 6pm continued. *Lateline*, the only single-issue current affairs discussion program on Australian television, continued into 1999 after its survival was under threat from a proposal for a late-evening news bulletin.

The Federal Government’s debt-retirement program received a boost when it sold for \$650 million the nationwide transmission network used by the ABC and SBS television networks. A British company paid about \$250 million more than the expected sale price.

An ABC whistleblower, John Millard, continued his campaign of keeping the public informed about the erosion of the independence of the national broadcaster. In the *SMH* (20/1), Millard wrote that under Johns and McDonald the ABC had embarked in the past two years on the most comprehensive outsourcing program in its history. “Fully funded ABC production areas have been decimated. The empty offices and dismantled facilities are the remains of vigorous, in-house, independent productions.”

During the Balkans war, the ABC’s correspondents in Belgrade came under siege from foreign broadcasters desperate to use their material because most Western journalists had been expelled from Serbia. At the end of March, ABC correspondent Greg Wilesmith was one of the few remaining English-speaking TV journalists still filing from Belgrade after the Serbian Government had banished all foreign journalists working for NATO countries. Belgrade accused the journalists of spying or spreading lies. A month later the ABC’s

highly acclaimed coverage of the war had blown out the news and current affairs budget and the ABC board had automatically approved additional funding to keep the team on the ground.

At the end of June the ABC withdrew its television news service from the Seven Network's Asian satellite signal, Australian Television. Seven refused to pay the ABC about \$1 million a year for the service.

An all-party Victorian parliamentary committee on economic development conducted an 11-month inquiry into whether the ABC had a bias towards Sydney. The report's findings were hardly surprising — such bias was detected; and the committee accused the ABC of withholding information on finances and staffing from it.

Fairfax

There continued to be upheaval in the upper echelons of the management and editorial control of John Fairfax newspapers during the year. In August Bob Muscat became the third chief executive in three years to resign from Fairfax. A former News Ltd senior executive, Muscat left to become chief executive of the magazine publisher, PMP Communications, chaired by former News Ltd CEO Ken Cowley. Fairfax found itself searching for a chief executive for the 10th time in 11 years. Even before the hunt could begin seriously, Fairfax was rocked by other departures, the most notable being that of the editor, John Lyons. Editor-in-chief Gregory Hywood dismissed Lyons on the day that he was photographed lunching with Lachlan Murdoch, then the News Ltd CEO, and Col Allan, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*. Hywood appointed the 1998 winner of the Graham Perkin Award as Australian Journalist of the Year, Paul McGeough (pron. McGoh), as editor, and Paul Bailey as senior deputy editor. During the same week, Max Walsh left Fairfax to become editor-in-chief of *The Bulletin* magazine, under the command of John Alexander, former *SMH* editor in chief. In October, Fred Hilmer, a part-time professor of management at the Australian Graduate School of Management, was appointed the new chief executive of Fairfax. Hilmer, the architect of competition reform in Australia as the author in 1993 of the Hilmer report, signed a five-year contract with Fairfax.

Brierley Investments sold its 24.4 percent stake in John Fairfax Holdings on 10 December, raising \$612 million. This left FFX Trust as the group's largest single shareholder, ended seven years of foreign control of the media company and left Fairfax with, for the first time in its history, no obvious controlling shareholder. Fairfax bought 9.9 percent of the Fairfax stake and the remaining 14.4 percent was sold to a wide range of Australian institutional and retail investors. This took the FFX Trust's 14.9 percent holding to 16.4 percent. Brian Powers, chairman of Fairfax, held 14.9 percent of FFX and Kerry Packer's private company, Consolidated Press, held 31 percent. In May, FFX reduced its holding in Fairfax to 14.9 percent to comply with a direction from the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA).

In March, the ABA found, after a nine-month inquiry, that the interests held by Kerry Packer and Brian Powers in Fairfax did not breach cross-media ownership rules. The ABA's final decision was changed following a letter from Packer's lawyers in December. The letter was not included in the 181-page report. The investigation was prompted by the appointment of a former Packer executive, Brian Powers, to the Fairfax board on 18 May 1998, the day on which he resigned from Packer-associated companies, including Publishing and Broadcasting, and the main Packer private company, Consolidated Press Holdings. Eleven days after joining the Fairfax board, Powers became chairman. The ABA report concluded that although Powers and the Packer family were not in control of Fairfax between 18 May and 24 August, Powers had considerable influence over some key decisions made by the publishers in 1998, and maintained strong links with the Packer empire.

In January the *SMH* appointed Michelle Grattan as a political columnist and Peter Cole-Adams as a political correspondent, based in Canberra. Grattan was the chief political correspondent of *The Age*, 1976-93, edited the *Canberra Times* for three years and later wrote for the *Australian Financial Review*. Cole-Adams was a foreign correspondent and associate editor of *The Age* and was most recently political editor for the *Canberra Times*.

For the year to 30 June 1999, Fairfax reported a record net profit of \$180.3 million, an increase of 61.28 percent. Fairfax announced it had brought Project Hercules, its \$40 million cost-cutting drive, to an end. Fairfax sold *Australian Geographic*, Artist Services and part of the company's indirect stake in telecommunications carrier AAPT, which gave it a profit of \$16.65 million.

In October Fairfax stepped up its online push by appointing David Shein as a director. Shein, 38, was the managing director and major shareholder of Com Tech, a provider of computer networking and communications products, including E-commerce.

The Coalition's influential backbench committee on communications took Fairfax executives to task in May over coverage in Fairfax newspapers of Coalition policies, even warning that it might affect the committee's views on future media ownership laws. Fairfax CEO Fred Hilmer was invited to appear before the committee to explain the Fairfax submission to the Productivity Commission's inquiry into media laws. Fairfax argued for deregulation of both the cross-media and foreign-ownership laws to enable it to expand into datacasting once digital television is introduced in Australia in 2001.

At the end of June Fairfax announced plans to build a \$220 million high-tech printing plant at Tullamarine in Melbourne, principally for *The Age* but also for the *Australian Financial Review*. Fairfax said it would spend the \$220 million over three years, with payments to be met by ongoing cashflow.

Murdoch

Even for Rupert Murdoch, it was quite a year, but on the personal rather than the business front. His first wife died, his second wife divorced him and he married a third wife. Patricia Maeder (née Booker) died in Adelaide on 12 November at the age of 70. Murdoch attended the funeral and was photographed with his daughter of that marriage. In July Murdoch's second wife, Anna Maria (née Torv), who separated from him three months earlier, filed for divorce in California in a petition which made no estimate of his worth but

which raised the prospect of a 50/50 split of his News Corp interests, valued at about \$14 billion. Anna Murdoch left the board of News Corp soon after. On 8 June a judgment of dissolution of the marriage was filed in the Los Angeles Superior Court, leaving the family ownership and management of News Corp unaffected. Rupert and Anna married in 1967, the year Wendy Deng was born.

Newspapers had reported in October 1998 that Rupert Murdoch, at 67, and Wendy Deng, at 31, were an item. More, they were living in a suite in the trendiest part of Manhattan. By the end of November, Murdoch was telling friends he intended to marry Deng, the Chinese-born, Yale-educated vice-president of Star TV, News Corp's Asian satellite service. In January Wendy met Rupert's mother when Dame Elisabeth Murdoch celebrated her 90th birthday and the wider Murdoch family in April when Rupert's sister, Helen Handbury, turned 70. On Friday evening, 25 June, Rupert and Wendy married on his yacht, *Morning Glory*, in New York Harbour under the gaze of the Statue of Liberty. His four children — one from his first marriage and three from his second — attended. Deng, who had resigned her Star TV position, was seen as irrevocably changing the “dynamics of the Murdoch dynasty” which had seemed to be working in the favor of the second youngest child, Lachlan Murdoch. Lachlan was appointed senior vice-president of News Corp's global operations in February, putting him clearly in front of Elisabeth, three years his senior, and James, one year his junior. In his new role, the former chief executive of News Ltd planned to split his time equally between Australia and the United States.

Lachlan himself went to the altar on 27 March to marry so-called super-model Sarah O'Hare at the Murdoch family property, “Cavan”, on the Murrumbidgee River, near Yass, New South Wales. They had been engaged since November.

News Corp (through BSkyB) and Microsoft made big investments in British digital television services, which began on 1 October. BSkyB's third-quarter profit nosedived by 83 percent as the company spent

more to win subscribers for its digital service. Pre-tax profit was \$16 million. News Corp bought 35 percent of Telecom Italia's loss-making pay TV operation, Stream, in May.

News Corp won shareholder approval in June for its \$2.11 billion selective share buyback. The move cemented News Corp's partnership with US group, Liberty Media Corporation, which provides cable and satellite TV programs, particularly sports broadcasts. Liberty emerged with 8 percent of News.

Rupert Murdoch, the pioneer of direct-to-home satellite television in Britain and Asia, predicted in June that broadband cable would become the leading technology for voice, data and television. News Corp, he told the National Cable Television Association in Chicago, saw its future in cable in both Western Europe and the US.

In News Corp's 1997-98 annual report, Murdoch said the group could reach almost 75 percent of the world's population, but was determined to become "fully global". He referred specifically to "greatly" expanding in Japan and India. "We can and will become wholly international, establishing ourselves outside the English-speaking world in countries where the language and culture are strange to us."

The inaugural chairman of News Corp, Sir Norman Young, died in Adelaide in May, aged 87. The Glasgow-born chartered accountant was chairman of News Ltd, 1970-81, and of News Corp, 1979-81.

The British Government blocked BSkyB's \$1.6 billion bid to take over the nation's most famous soccer team, Manchester United. The decision followed a six-month Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigation which concluded that the deal would have been bad for both broadcasting and for British soccer.

After three months of dilly-dallying, Singapore Airlines found it did not have a deal with News Ltd which had agreed to sell half its share in Ansett for \$500 million. The final straw came when Singapore Airlines tried to initiate negotiations with Ansett part-owner, Air New Zealand, which had pre-emptive rights over News Ltd's 50 percent stake.

In the first six months of 1998-99, News Corp lifted bottom-line earnings 8.4 percent to \$969 million. It booked a \$92 million abnormal gain after accounting for a \$973 million profit from the 1998 public float of Fox Entertainment Group Inc. and losses from the sale of its US satellite assets, rugby league activities and ending satellite activities in Indonesia. The full-year profit was down 35 percent to \$1.09 billion. Record annual operating profits for News's filmed entertainment, TV stations and inserts businesses were offset by lower profit from Fox Broadcasting Network, losses at the Fox News Channel and higher spending on its Internet investments. News booked a net abnormal loss of \$358 million, largely the result of the cost of converting BSkyB's customers to digital.

News Ltd established in November a new corporate vehicle to spearhead its digital TV strategy in Australia and to push for a fourth commercial television licence. News Broadcasting Australia Pty Ltd was established, with Jim Blomfield, a former Nine Network veteran, at its chief executive. He was most recently head of News Corp's digital satellite venture in Japan.

Packer

Kerry Packer began the year by putting his heart in the hands of one of the world's leading cardiac surgeons, Dr Wayne Isom, of New York, and by the end of the year he had his heart's desire — a casino. The operation was the latest round of heart surgery for Packer, who is believed to have had a leaking mitral valve replaced and an arterial bypass. In September he strongly endorsed the re-election of John Howard as Prime Minister. In October Publishing and Broadcasting Ltd (PBL) ended five years of warfare over pay TV by taking up its option to pay about \$160 million for 25 percent of Foxtel. This forged a fresh alliance with Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd.

The Federal Court ruled in October that Packer's Consolidated Press Holdings (CPH) would not have to pay tax on earnings of \$500 million, the subject of a re-assessment by the Commission of Taxation. The amount of taxation in dispute exceeded \$200 million. The number of proceedings before Justice Graham Hill was watered down from

23 to eight early in the piece. A month later the *SMH* reported that CPH had made \$614.53 million in profit in the previous two years that would normally attract \$221.23 million of income tax at the company rate of 36 percent, but CPH had not paid a cent. For example, for the year to 30 June 1998, CPH made \$385.2 million and paid no tax. The accounts showed that *prime facie* tax at 36 percent would have cost \$138.6 million. But the combination of franking credits from dividends worth about \$40 million, \$55 million of non-assessable income, and future income tax benefits wiped out the tax bill.

In March Kerry Packer realised a dream when he became the controller of a casino. PBL bought a controlling interest in Melbourne's Crown Casino when Crown shareholders voted almost unanimously for the PBL takeover. Packer tried unsuccessfully to win the Sydney casino licence in 1993 through a joint bid with US casino operator, Circus Circus, and in 1997 he pulled out of an agreement to acquire the management contract and equity in the Sydney casino from Showboat.

In February PBL bought 19.8 percent of telephone carrier One.Tel for \$354.5 million, a stake whose value jumped 50 percent in two months. At the end of March Packer completed the sale of his stake in Cable & Wireless Optus for a profit of \$140 million. In April he raised \$500 million with a share placement to help repay debt inherited from the Crown Casino buy. In May CPH won full control of Hoyts Cinemas after the Hoyts chief executive, Peter Ivany, announced the sale of 11.2 percent of Hoyts capital to Packer.

Packer's Nine Network axed the 26-year-old *Midday* show at the end of 1998 and announced in April that it would axe *Sports Saturday* and *Sports Sunday* in July 1999.

Packer's online arm, ecorp, made a stunning Stock Exchange debut, by most measures, but the first-day 58 percent premium added to its issue price was modest by cyberspace standards. Shares for ecorp traded as high as \$1.97 after starting at \$1.90. Twenty-one percent of the shares not owned by PBL changed hands on the first day.

The Packer magazines and the Murdoch newspapers developed selective vision in October when it came to the matter of the discarded marriage plans of James Packer and Kate Fischer. Packer paid Fischer \$10 million. *New Idea* broke the story, and the non-Murdoch newspapers followed with their own accounts. But some concentrated osmosis took effect at ACP magazines and at Murdoch's papers (after an alleged call from the Packer camp) and the editors of the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Australian*, the *Courier-Mail* and the *Herald Sun* somehow reached the conclusion that the split between the high-profile couple was "not news" despite what all the other media had determined. A month later James Packer's new partner, Jodie Meares, strode on to the front page of the *Daily Telegraph*, modelling the new range of Schiaparelli lingerie. News values?

PBL reported a full-year net profit of \$173.93 million, a fall of 63 percent. The previous year's profit included a one-off abnormal gain from the revaluation of TV licences.

Media ownership rules

The Howard Government had no plans in September to revisit the media-ownership debate, according to its Communications Minister Richard Alston. On 3 October, the Government was re-elected. By the end of March the debate was being revisited. Kerry Packer left his calling card, appearing on television on 24 March, ostensibly for the re-launch of his *Bulletin* magazine, with Max Walsh as editor-in-chief. Packer, formerly an opponent of relaxing rules on foreign investment in Australia's media, suggested the cross-media and foreign ownership rules were becoming redundant in the age of the Internet. He said the Government should recognise that local ownership was going to break down and so the rules should allow companies to compete in the world market, instead of sentencing them to be bit players. The previous day, at a private function, James Packer, as executive chairman of Publishing & Broadcasting Ltd, said it was no longer possible — much less sensible — to regulate the ownership of media outlets. "Tens of millions of people in the US get their news from America Online, and yet AOL owns no TV, radio

or newspaper assets,” he said. “So the idea that we can delineate media types based on certain outdated characteristics and determine who can own them in any particular geographic location is plainly outdated.” The distinction between media forms had blurred beyond the point of recognition. With the imminence of high bandwidths, which would allow better quality video on the Web, that distinction would evaporate entirely.

The Packers spoke out even as the Productivity Commission was about to begin a Government-commissioned inquiry into media ownership rules, content regulations, licence fees and the impending switch from analogue to digital technologies. The commission said it would ask the two basic questions that underpin the tighter laws governing TV and radio than those governing print: (a) does any one medium exercise more influence over community views than the other media; and (b) what constitutes quality in broadcast content? Cameron O'Reilly, chief executive of APN News & Media Holdings Ltd, said the commission should be aware of the importance of protecting diversity of media ownership before it began to recommend any legislative changes. Research by a parliamentary librarian suggested that media ownership diversity would be halved, and the influence of existing major proprietors doubled, if ownership restrictions were abolished. The researcher, Kim Jackson, said the three pay TV companies offered 56 channels, but only one of these was an Australian news channel. The Internet's major contribution to media diversity had been to increase the possible influence of the print media by improving its household access. This could be seen as a reason for retaining the cross-media rules rather than abandoning them. Jackson's research showed that 30 of the most popular 100 Australian Internet sites were controlled by one of the big two newspaper groups, one of the main three commercial TV networks or the ABC.

Ethics

Journalists received a mini-lecture on ethics in a Sydney court in May when prisoner John Killick, whose girlfriend allegedly hijacked a helicopter to pluck him from Silverwater Jail, appeared to face fresh

charges arising from his most recent alleged escapade. In Central Local Court, Killick suggested to the magistrate Allan Moore: "Perhaps you could advise the media to respect their profession as journalists and not act as scriptwriters." He complained that during the previous two months statements had been made, of which 85 percent had not been substantiated, and the word "alleged" had not been mentioned.

The Federal Labor frontbencher Jenny Macklin attacked newspaper cartoonists for their persistent depiction of women in politics as sexual objects or frumpy housewives. She said cartoons depicting Democrats leader and GST negotiator Meg Lees in bed with John Howard or standing over him as a whip-wielding dominatrix were proof that cartoonists were incapable of seeing beyond female stereotypes. The cartoonist who offended most, Bill Leak, felt that John Howard had far more to complain about in two of the GST cartoons than women did, for the Prime Minister had also been depicted in a "stereotypical sexual role" but as the weaker party.

Senator John Tierney attacked the ethics of *The Australian* for paying for six members of a "rebel" Kosovar family to be taken by taxi from Singleton — where the family had been waiting for a train — to Sydney. The family had refused to accept the accommodation provided for them in the emergency camp at Singleton where some of the refugees from the Balkans war were being assisted. The patriarch of the family, Sabit Salihu, had inspired other Kosovars to refuse to get off the bus that had taken them to Singleton. Tierney accused *The Australian* of "undermining" the Government's policy on Kosovar accommodation arrangements, making the news, as opposed to reporting it, and infringing journalistic and Press Council ethics. When Errol Simper defended the paper's action in its columns, describing it as a humanitarian act, Tierney attacked Simper in a letter to the editor.

In the 1998 Andrew Olle Memorial Lecture, John Alexander, group publisher of specialist titles for Australian Consolidated Press, said he was disturbed by the trend for the medium to act as a "participant". Journalists were "arrogant and out of touch" and the media had become obsessed with "its own affairs, its own personalities". An economic time-bomb was ticking away for the traditional media,

especially the classifieds-dependent quality broadsheets. Alexander, who was sacked as publisher and editor-in-chief of the *Sydney Morning Herald* earlier in 1998, said he had still not been given an explanation for his dismissal.

When Nine Network political correspondent Laurie Oakes spoke at the Walkley Awards presentation, he took up the “participant” accusation made by Alexander. Oakes said that when he had been posted to Canberra about 30 years earlier, Alan Reid had been the “king” of the correspondents. “And Reidy was also the champion of being a participant in politics. He was much more a player than a journalist. He used to spend more time advising politicians than reporting on them.” In the 1961 federal election the Fairfax organisation “had the pigs with Menzies” and threw its whole weight behind Arthur Calwell. “In that election we had a Fairfax editor, Max Newton, writing Calwell’s speeches. And I don’t mean just turning them into English. I mean Arthur didn’t know what he was going to say until Max handed him the speech.”

The Age and London’s *Daily Mirror* terminated the services of Shane Warne as a columnist when news broke that the Australian Test spin bowler had been fined by the Australian Cricket Board for taking money from an illegal Indian bookmaker to provide information on pitch and weather conditions at international matches.

The editor of *The Age*, Michael Gawenda, stood firm against a barrage of criticism — especially from the Victoria Police Association and the Victims of Crime League — over the front-page color photograph his paper ran of an aerial view of the body of Melbourne policeman, Gary Silk, brutally shot dead, along with his partner. The photograph showed Sergeant Silk’s prone body beside a pool of blood. Gawenda personally cleared the photograph for use after he was telephoned in Lorne on a Sunday and was faxed a copy of the photograph. In a published response to criticism, he denied suggestions the picture had been enhanced to make the image more graphic. *The Age* did not “doctor pictures”, he said. The picture had been

confronting and shocking, “but what happened in Melbourne over the weekend was confronting and shocking”. It was *The Age’s* job to convey that to its readers and it had done so.

In July, One Nation Leader Pauline Hanson, then a member of the House of Representatives, used her Protective Services officer to eject a photographer and a reporter from a press conference at her Ipswich electorate office. Hanson said the *Queensland Times*, Ipswich — which the reporter and photographer represented — was “banned”. She blamed it for the poor showing of Heather Hill, the former One Nation leader, in the Ipswich electorate at the state election the previous month. “I refuse to talk to the *Queensland Times* until I am given a fair go.” Hanson’s action led the federal Justice Minister Amanda Vanstone to threaten to withdraw Hanson’s security. Vanstone had already warned Hanson that Australian Protective Service officers were not at her beck and call.

Newspapers

The Australian launched on 25 March the first section in any Australian newspaper devoted entirely to the media industry. It introduced as a 32-page tabloid liftout section, “exploring the people and issues driving the media industry”. The section included the week’s best round-up of media job vacancies, and the week’s TV programs.

On 26 June *The Weekend Australian* announced that the “circle of colour” was complete: the West Australian edition of the paper joined its counterparts in eastern states by printing in colour from that date. News Ltd had spent two years adapting its Canning Vale printing plant, south-east of Perth, to house the new \$100 million presses which will run seven days a week.

Fairfax chief executive Fred Hilmer told the Melbourne Press Club it was not enough for newspapers simply to keep costs down. They had to improve quality and marketing to counter the effects of the increasing fragmentation of the media. Fairfax needed to become an active player in the Internet to offset a reliance on newspaper publishing for its profits.

In February, defying the circulation slump which had set in since *The Australian* dropped its cover price in Victoria from 90c to 40c, *The Age* increased its weekday price by 10¢ to \$1 and its Saturday price by 20¢ to \$1.70. The circulation of *The Age* fell by 5.8 percent to 191,150 in the six months to the end of 1998. The *West Australian* lifted its weekday cover price 10¢ to 80¢ in July and its Saturday edition 10¢ to \$1.50. The *Weekend Australian* jumped 20¢ to \$1.50. In August the *Courier-Mail* lifted its weekday cover price 10¢ to 80¢ and in May its Saturday cover by 10¢ on Saturdays to \$1.30. On 4 August the *Australian* for one day, slashed its cover price from \$1 to 10¢. Toshiba paid an estimated \$150,000 to subsidise the paper and used it to launch a new range of chrome laptop computers.

In 1998, custom magazine publishing and regional daily newspapers scored best from the extra \$532.61 million in advertising pumped through mainstream media. Figures from the Commercial Economic Advisory Service of Australia show that total advertising expenditure was \$8 billion. The growth was 1.6 percent in 1996, 9.4 percent in 1997 and 7.4 percent in 1998. Total expenditure on print media in 1998 was \$4.7 billion, with newspapers scoring \$3,011.50 million. The custom-magazine category registered an increase of 102 percent, taking its total to \$101.05 million. Regional daily newspapers gained an extra \$64.25 million, taking their total to \$363.16 million. Television increased by \$151.14 million to \$2,399.52 million. Radio scored \$556.78 million.

Newspapers are increasingly promoting their readership as opposed to their circulation. The *SMH* recorded “the biggest increase in readership of any newspaper in NSW” — up 7.4 percent over the year to December 1998. The paper attracted 1,378,000 readers each Saturday, according to the Roy Morgan research. Weekdays the *SMH* was averaging more than 900,000 readers each day, up 2.7 percent on 1997. The *Courier-Mail* recorded “the best weekday readership growth of any major Australian metropolitan newspaper”, with an average of 607,000 people reading it — up 6.3 percent. Saturday readership increased by 2.2 percent to 921,000. The *Weekend Australian* recorded

“one of the strongest rises in readership numbers”, adding 58,000, or 6.6 percent, to reach 931,000 readers. The weekday *Australian* rose by 6.5 percent to 425,000 readers.

The Australian Competition Tribunal ruled in November that newsagents would lose their monopoly over the distribution of newspapers, including home deliveries. Describing the newsagency system as severely anti-competitive, the tribunal ruled that restrictions on publishers’ direct wholesale distribution to so-called “look-alike” newsagency-type businesses would be banned from 1 July 1999. On 1 February 2000, the newsagents would lose two monopolies: on distribution to sub-agents and on home delivery of newspapers.

The *Border Mail*, Albury’s morning daily, shifted across the border to Wodonga, Victoria, in June. The independent media company, owned for 96 years by the paper’s founders, the Mott family, bought a 2.54 hectare site and buildings known as The Glasshouse in September 1998 and constructed a 2,000 square metre press hall with the capacity to house the next generation of press equipment. The *Mail* opened for business in Wodonga on 21 June.

Newspaper publishers increased significantly their use of high-grade newsprint — and advertisers took advantage of this. So much of this success came through news-inserted magazines that at the end of 1998 two newspaper companies ranked in the top four magazine publishers in Australia in terms of advertising revenue. Russell Collier, of the Newspaper Advertising Bureau, said the phenomenon had resulted from the convergence of two newspaper-industry trends: increased sectionalisation, and strong growth in weekend reading. Consumers took it for granted that major weekend newspapers would now include at least one inserted magazine, covering everything from investigative journalism to comprehensive TV and entertainment guides.

The *Courier-Mail* continued its involvement in a public journalism project run in conjunction with journalism staff at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT). In September it published a series of articles on immigration and population policy as the second in a series of three projects. The series culminated in a public journalism forum at QUT.

The Melbourne-based *Daily Commercial News* ceased appearing as a national daily on 7 April 1999 after 108 years of daily issue. In March, APN News and Media sold the title to the Informa Group plc, a merger of the IBC Group plc, formerly Lloyd's of London Press. As a result, the *News* was merged with *Lloyd's List Australia Weekly* and from 12 April was published tri-weekly as *Lloyd's List Daily Commercial News*. Howard Ignatius Moffat established the *Daily Commercial News* on 13 April 1891.

The exclusive Olympic ticket promotion run in News Ltd's Sunday papers contributed to almost across-the-board Sunday newspaper growth for the group in the six months to 30 June. Compared with the same half-year figures for 1998, the circulation of News's *Sunday Telegraph* increased by 0.72 percent to 720,505 while Fairfax's *Sun-Herald* fell 2.12 percent to 600,000. The *Australian Financial Review Weekend Edition* jumped 10.38 percent to 85,000. Of the dailies, *The Australian* gained 3.62 percent, Monday to Friday (to 131,097), the *Courier-Mail* 2.92 percent (218,900) and the *Advertiser* 2.05 percent (209,122). The *Sydney Morning Herald* weekday sales fell by 1.89 percent (233,500) and Saturday sales by 1.22 percent (405,500). The *Weekend Australian* fell by 0.06 percent (310,394). Overall, the figures confirmed the trend of recent years for a strengthening of weekend editions and Sunday papers, and a decline on weekdays. *SMH* publisher Greg Hywood said online news delivery was having an impact on newspaper sales. In the regions, only 14 of the 35 ABC-audited dailies recorded circulation gains to 30 June. Two papers which changed their format from broadsheet to tabloid were among the notable performers: the *Newcastle Herald*, a tabloid since 27 July, halted its decline with an impressive increase of 5,912 for the year; and the *Bendigo Advertiser*, a tabloid since 29 June 1998, increased by 333 to 14,677.

Table 1: Newspaper circulations

Newspaper	Six months to 30/6/99	Six months to 30/6/98	Change %*
<i>Australian</i> (M-F)	131,097	126,514	+ 3.62
<i>Australian</i> (Sat.)	310,394	310,597	– 0.06
<i>Australian Financial Review</i> (M-F)	92,000	91,000	+ 1.09
<i>AFR Weekend Edition</i> (Sat.)	85,000	77,000	+10.38
<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (M-F)	432,105	437,986	– 1.34
<i>Daily Telegraph</i> (Sat.)	354,219	367,941	– 3.72
<i>SMH</i> (M-F)	233,500	238,000	– 1.89
<i>SMH</i> (Sat.)	405,500	410,500	– 1.21
<i>Sun-Herald</i>	600,000	613,000	– 2.12
<i>Sunday Telegraph</i>	720,505	715,358	+ 0.72
<i>Herald-Sun</i> (M-F)	560,887	563,800	– 0.51
<i>Herald-Sun</i> (Sat.)	521,417	524,000	– 0.49
<i>Age</i> (M-F)	195,599	202,573	– 3.44
<i>Age</i> (Sat.)	340,577	354,362	– 3.89
<i>Sunday Herald-Sun</i>	534,100	524,100	+ 1.90
<i>Sunday Age</i> 197,175	205,832	– 4.20	
<i>Courier-Mail</i> (M-F)	218,900	212,675	+ 2.92
<i>Courier-Mail</i> (Sat.)	342,500	341,000	+ 0.43
<i>Sunday Mail</i> (Qld)	591,300	585,400	+ 1.00
<i>Advertiser</i> (M-F)	209,122	204,905	+ 2.05
<i>Advertiser</i> (Sat.)	277,448	271,751	+ 2.09
<i>Sunday Mail</i> (SA)	348,367	344,778	+ 1.01
<i>West Australian</i> (M-F)	221,282	227,114	– 2.56
<i>West Australian</i> (Sat.)	389,810	389,226	+ 0.15
<i>Sunday Times</i> (WA)	344,149	346,415	– 0.65

<i>Mercury</i> (M-F)	50,802	50,140	+ 1.43
<i>Mercury</i> (Sat.)	64,572	63,435	+ 1.79
<i>Sunday Examiner</i>	42,571	41,777	+ 1.90
<i>Sunday Tasmanian</i>	57,249	53,928	+ 6.15
<i>Canberra Times</i> (M-F)	39,678	41,631	– 4.69
<i>Canberra Times</i> (Sat.)	71,254	71,999	– 1.03
<i>Canberra Times</i> (Sun.)	37,450	38,939	– 3.82
<i>Northern Territory News</i> (M-F)	23,109	23,033	+ 0.32
<i>Northern Territory News</i> (Sat.)	31,364	31,122	+ 0.78
<i>Sunday Territorian</i>	25,967	25,068	+ 3.59

Magazines

PMP Communications Ltd announced in February it would consolidate its magazine operations in Sydney to halt a slide in divisional earnings. PMP posted a net profit of \$37.81 million for the half-year to December. PMP's publishing division — primarily the magazine business — suffered a 31.6 percent slide in operating profit. Most magazine operations would be based in Sydney, a move the company estimated would save \$1.5 million a year. PMP announced in June that it was buying Australian-based magazine distributor, Gordon & Gotch, from New Zealand's Independent Newspapers. No price was given. The full-year profit was \$57.06 million, almost 2 percent down on the previous year.

When magazine sales slipped late in the final quarter of 1998, publishers blamed "post-Diana" syndrome. In the six months to 31 December, the combined sales of the *Australian Women's Weekly*, *Woman's Day*, *New Idea*, and *Who Weekly* fell 5,223,258. The *Bulletin* lost an average of 15,771 sales a week in falling to 76,000. The chief executive of Australian Consolidated Press, Colin Morrison, said magazine readers seemed to want more fantasy and some attempt to counteract the negatives of so much bad news. The editor of *New Idea*, Bunty Avieson,

said: "This year *New Idea* will be a nicer magazine. There has been a growing distaste for the brassy, gossipy formula which worked in the late 1980s. Women want different things from their magazines now."

In April, the editor-in-chief of Australia's *Harper's Bazaar*, Karin Upton-Baker, was sent to the US for two months to edit the American edition of the magazine after the death of its editor-in-chief, Elizabeth Tilberis.

In April medical sociologist Anne Ring warned that the new wave of magazines which had emerged on the newsstands in the previous 12 months, was using misleading imagery and persuasive text to promote cosmetic surgery and surgeons. Dr Ring briefed a NSW inquiry on the cosmetic industry about her analysis of four magazines which, she said, demonstrated how surgeons working in the field had jumped on the commercial bandwagon.

Nene King resigned in March as editorial director of *Woman's Day*, citing her ongoing grief at the death of her husband almost three years earlier.

In December *Australian House & Garden* celebrated its 50th anniversary and in February Pacific Publications pumped \$6 million into the elaborate launch of its new young women's magazine, *B*. The 148-page first issue contained 40 pages of advertising at nearly \$11,000 a page.

At *Vogue*, the Scottish-born Marion Hume, editor (in September), and Peter Gaunt, managing director (in February), lost their jobs, with Juliet Ashworth, from *Woman's Day*, replacing Hume, and Conde Nast International chairman, Jonathon Newhouse, becoming interim chairman of Conde Nast Australia. In February, *Woman's Day* became the latest magazine to launch its own TV show, *Woman's Day ET*, on the Nine Network. Australian Consolidated Press hoped the show would lift the magazine's circulation by 50,000.

The Bulletin, by the end of February, had three ex-Fairfax employees in key roles: Max Walsh as editor-in-chief, Paul Bailey as editor, John Lyons as national affairs editor. They were all under the oversight of another former Fairfax executive, John Alexander, publisher of ACP's

specialist magazines. In March, Alexander became chief executive of ACP and a PBL director when Briton Colin Morrison returned to the UK. Walsh dropped the columns of former Labor senator Graham Richardson and former Liberal Party federal director, Andrew Robb, along with those of finance journalists Michael Pascoe and Russell Lander. Bruce Guthrie, former editor of *The Age*, was appointed in December as editor of *Who Weekly*. Time Inc had sent him to New York to work on *People* magazine, the American version of *Who*.

Reporting on the circulation figures for the six months to June 1999, one commentator observed: "The Australian love affair with the magazine is not over, but infidelity is rife as old favourites struggle to compete with the new and the sexy." Despite the turbulence reflected in the figures — 16 of the titles suffered circulation decreases up to more than 25 percent — only one change occurred in the actual composition of the top 20 for the year: in its first year *Take 5* displaced *Marie Claire*, jumping straight into 12th place. The top three remained the same (see Table 2), despite losing 534,745 sales between them, but *Reader's Digest* (4th this year) and *That's Life* (5th) reversed last year's order. *For Me*, with a 39.2 percent rise in circulation, jumped from 20th to 16th.

Table 2: Top 20 magazines by circulation

Magazine title	Six months to 30/6/99	Six months to 30/6/98	Change %
1. <i>Australian Women's Weekly</i>	759,010	963,626	-21.23
2. <i>Woman's Day</i>	655,900	892,155	-26.48
3. <i>New Idea</i>	476,544	570,418	-16.45
4. <i>Reader's Digest</i>	471,259	501,059	- 5.95
5. <i>That's Life</i>	440,621	523,577	-15.84
6. <i>Better Homes and Gardens</i>	314,021	318,751	- 1.48
7. <i>TV Week</i>	301,748	354,481	-14.88
8. <i>Cosmopolitan</i>	223,991	222,351	+ 0.74
9. <i>Cleo</i>	206,427	234,264	-11.47
10. <i>Who Weekly</i>	205,796	210,721	- 2.34
11. <i>Dolly</i>	195,578	195,000	- 0.30

12. <i>Take 5</i>	188,690	—	n.a.
13. <i>Australian Family Circle</i>	187,130	243,882	−23.27
14. <i>TV Hits</i>	186,882	253,000	−26.13
15. <i>Australian Good Taste</i>	170,183	150,897	+12.78
16. <i>For Me</i>	168,068	120,731	+39.20
17. <i>Girlfriend</i>	158,426	176,246	−10.11
18. <i>NW (New Weekly)</i>	150,656	185,176	−18.64
19. <i>Picture</i>	149,788	159,129	− 5.87
20. <i>Time</i>	141,266	144,153	− 2.00

Other publishers

APN News & Media Ltd bought the daily *Gympie Times* and six small community newspapers from Rural Press Ltd in June. It was the first regional daily APN had bought since July 1988 when the company acquired the Provincial Newspapers (Qld) Ltd group — which had 13 dailies. The community weeklies that Rural Press sold were in Rockhampton, Ipswich and the Sunshine Coast. Rural Press managing director Brian McCarthy said the papers had been sold because they were not in a core market for the company, geographically, whereas they were for APN. The *Australian Financial Review* said the deal had been negotiated over four or five months and the price was \$10 million.

In March, APN announced the sale of six titles, including the *Daily Commercial News*, for \$12 million, as part of a continuing rationalisation of its troublesome specialty publishing arm. APN announced a 10 percent increase in December year net profit to \$35.27 million. Its first-half profit for 1999 was \$16.7 million.

John Sanders, APN newspaper division chief executive for 20 months, crossed the Tasman to take up the position of chief executive director of the Auckland-based Wilson & Horton newspaper group on 4 October. The group's flagship newspaper is the *New Zealand Herald*. Sanders took Martin Simons, who had been general manager of APN's *Morning Bulletin*, Rockhampton, to become chief executive of W&H Regional Newspapers, a new position responsible for 10

dailies and 36 non-daily newspapers. Replacing Sanders at APN headquarters in Brisbane was Ken Steinke, who had been APN southern regional manager and general manager of the *Northern Star*, Lismore. Wilson & Horton, one of New Zealand's two major newspaper groups, is owned by Dr Tony O'Reilly's Dublin-based Independent Newspapers. The O'Reilly family and Independent Newspapers control APN. Cameron O'Reilly, APN's chief executive, had only recently taken up the additional role of chairman of W&H when he found his NZ chief executive, Philip Crawley, heading for Canada to become president and chief operating officer of the *Toronto Globe & Mail*.

Rural Press emerged from the pack to pay \$160 million for the *Canberra Times* in September. Originally, eight companies expressed an interest in the acquisition when Kerry Stokes's Australian Capital Equity was seeking more than \$200 million, but four dropped out, leaving a short list of four, reportedly APN, Fairfax, West Australian Newspapers and Rural Press. In December John B. Fairfax spent about \$17 million acquiring more shares in Rural Press, lifting the Fairfax family holding in the company from 51 percent to 52 percent. The company reported a full-year profit of \$41.7 million, which included an 11.4 percent jump in abnormal net profits and a 19.6 percent increase in revenue.

Big increases in advertising revenue and circulation lifted net profit for West Australian Newspaper Holdings by 40.6 percent to \$48.3 million in the first nine months of 1998-99. Group operating profit before abnormals rose 8.1 percent to \$70.9 million. Advertising revenue for the *West Australian* rose 5.9 percent to \$142.5 million and net circulation income jumped 11.4 percent to \$46.1 million.

Legal

The defamation action of the year was the Abbott and Costello action against author Bob Ellis and publisher Random House. Rarely has a defamation action occasioned such levity in the news media. The plaintiffs, the Federal Treasurer Peter Costello, the Minister for Employment Tony Abbott and their wives, Tanya and Margaret, respectively, won a total of \$277,500 in damages after the ACT

Supreme Court found that each had been defamed by Random House in a false and salacious account of their relationship as students in Ellis's book, *Goodbye Jerusalem*. Justice Terence Higgins awarded Tanya Costello \$90,000, her husband Peter \$74,000, Tony Abbott \$66,000 and his wife, Margaret, \$47,500. Random House appealed against the judgment.

The Victorian Premier, Jeff Kennett, was expected to face legal costs of more than \$200,000 after a Supreme Court jury found in March that an article published in *The Australian* in 1998 did not defame him. Justice David Ashley ordered Kennett to pay *The Australian's* costs. Kennett had brought the action because he said the newspaper had alleged, wrongly, that his wife had separated from him because he was having relationships with the arts director Maude Palmer and the former Australian Grand Prix chief executive Judith Griggs.

The man at the centre of the Mr Bubbles case, which involved allegations of sexual assault of children at a northern Sydney kindergarten, was stripped in Februthe of his \$350,000 defamation payout. The State of NSW appealed to the NSW Court of Appeal, seeking to overturn two awards totalling \$800,000 granted in February 1998 to Tony Deren and his wife, Dawn. Dawn Deren's payout of \$450,000 was allowed to stand.

In March the Victorian Director of Public Prosecutions dropped criminal charges against four former editors of the La Trobe University student newspaper, *Rabelais*. The charges had related to the distribution of an "objectionable publication", a July 1995 edition of the paper which contained an article headed "The art of shoplifting" (see "News Media Chronicle" last year).

The NSW Supreme Court dismissed a contempt of court complaint against the *SMH* over an investigative article that featured a man about to face trial. Justice Barr found that a series of articles which appeared in the *SMH* in October 1997 had the tendency to interfere with justice at the trial of Duong Van Ia — an alleged "Mr Big" of the drug trade — which was listed for March 1998, but did not constitute contempt. Using expert evidence and a telephone survey of *SMH* readers, John Fairfax Publications had sought to show that

potential jurors at Duong's trial would not remember his name from newspaper stories published five months earlier. Justice Barr rejected that proposition, saying that a single question about name recognition in a telephone survey would not exact the same response as repeated references throughout a trial.

In reporting the story of “the boy in the box” — whose mother and *de facto* were jailed by Maroochydore District Court for 9½ years for torturing and assaulting the child — virtually all Queensland-based news media were at pains not to identify the child, but *The Courier-Mail* ran a picture of the boy on its front page on 21 October and named him. Three weeks later a bill was introduced into the Queensland Parliament to prohibit publication of the names and photographs of children such as “the boy in the box”.

Cairns District Court judge Peter White warned that Innisfail magistrate Greg McIntyre would have overstepped the mark if he had proceeded with an order that a convicted female defendant submit to being photographed by the *Innisfail Advocate* to shame her. Deborah Ann Powell was ordered by the magistrate to perform 150 hours of community service after a wild birthday party in June 1998 when \$20,000 damage was caused to the Goondi sports complex. The magistrate also ordered Powell to submit to as photograph by the local paper for her part in the melee, but later withdrew this order. On appeal, Justice White reduced the community-service order to 60 hours and said he would have overruled the order about the photograph if it had not been vacated. “It is not open to the court to conjure up novel forms of punishment that are not determined by law,” he said.

A Queensland Supreme Court judge ordered *The Courier-Mail* to disclose a copy of an article before it was published, but then withdrew the order. Australian Press Council chairman Profess Dennis Pearce said the order, by Justice Ros Atkinson, would have invaded the fundamental principles of freedom of the press. Sydney media lawyer and Malleson Stephen Jaques partner Graham Bates said he had not heard of such an order in more than 28 years of practice.

The photographer, Grant Matthews, who captured model Kate Fischer cupping her breasts in a playfully voluptuous pose for *Cleo*, was awarded \$1,650 in damages by a Federal Court judge in September after the photograph was further published on the cover of *New Idea* without his permission.

A former director of the Australian War Memorial, Brendon Kelson, won an \$82,500 defamation payout over a *Sunday Age* article which wrongly implied he had retired suddenly to avoid an inquiry into alleged workplace harassment.

Commercial television and radio

The ABA reported in March that in 1997-98, the 215 commercial radio operators earned \$94.7 million in profit — an increase of 27 percent — from revenues of \$595.8 million. Of the 39 radio licensees in capital cities, 29 earned a profit. In regional areas, 48 of the 176 licensees lost money. Television networks lifted profits by 7 percent. The 47 television licensees generated \$2.76 billion in revenue and profits of \$476.6 million. The Ten Network and its affiliates lifted profit by 16 percent to \$194.5 million; the Nine Network and its affiliates lifted profit by 21.9 percent to \$177.7 million; and the Seven Network and its affiliates reported a 28.4 percent fall in profit to \$84.1 million. Seven spent \$268.2 million on Australian programming, which is more than three times the \$78.9 million that Ten spent on total programming. Nine spent \$195.6 million on local programming.

The ABA issued new guidelines in October allowing radio stations to pool staff and equipment. Commercial radio stations were permitted to share engineers, copywriters, cleaners and copying equipment.

The NSW Labor Council sold its two ailing Newcastle radio stations, 2HD and NEW-FM, for \$12 million to Ball Caralis, who already owned 24 stations in rural NSW and Queensland.

After the federal election in October, one 2UE broadcaster, John Laws, accused another, Alan Jones, of “unacceptable bias” towards the Coalition during the campaign. Jones retaliated on air. And 2UE’s chairman, John Conde, carpeted them both, separately.

In August NWS-9, Adelaide, Australia’s last privately-owned metropolitan TV station, succumbed to industry rationalisation with its unexpected sale for \$98 million to Victorian-based Southern Cross Broadcasting. The Lamb family had owned the asset since 1982, and Packer’s Nine Network wanted to buy it. Southern Cross already owned Radio 3AW, Melbourne, and Ten Victoria. It also bought 96FM Perth.

Prime Television Ltd decided in March to end its \$203 million venture into Argentina after its Azul TV network lost more than \$26 million in a little over 12 months.

Seven’s flagship current affairs program, *Witness*, hosted by Paul Barry, was axed in August after consistently low ratings. As part of an aggressive targeting of sports programming, Seven beat off traditional cricket broadcaster Channel Nine to secure the rights to telecast the Tests and one-day matches during the next Ashes tour of England in 2001. Seven was reported in November to have spent more than \$300 million locking in or extending sports programming contracts well beyond 2000, with the expectation of higher ratings and higher revenues.

Seven cut even when it sold in August its 24.6 percent stake in Hollywood studio Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Inc. It had bought the interest two years earlier.

Chief executive Gary Rice resigned from Seven in September after it reported a 77.1 percent slump in annual net profit to \$20.4 million from flat revenue of \$803.1 million. The result came after a net abnormal loss of \$62 million related to writedowns on its investment in the former pay TV sports channel, Sports Vision, and costs associated with exiting its stake in MGM. Julian Mounter was appointed within weeks to replace Gary Rice. Mounter, 53, began his media career as a reporter on *The Times*, London, before moving to television

in 1972. For six years he was the chief executive of public broadcaster Television New Zealand and was credited with changing it from a bureaucracy to a highly profitable TV company.

For the year to 30 June, Seven reported a net profit of \$55.28 million. Sweeping programming changes, rising production costs and structural upheaval cut 38 percent from the pre-tax operating earnings. For the December half-year, Seven had reported a net profit of \$22.07 million, giving rise to reports that institutional investors would agitate for substantial changes. In March Seven announced it would sell 60 percent of its stake of \$125 million in Cable & Wireless Optus, raising up to \$270 million to fund its share buyback. The buyback resulted in the 26 percent stake held by Seven Network chairman and major shareholder, Kerry Stokes, jumping to 33 percent because his shares were not included in the buyback and the overall number of shares was reduced. As the year ended Seven moved to offload its remaining 50 million shares in Cable & Wireless Optus for about \$175 million.

Digital TV

An independent market research house forecast in August that Australia faced a \$30 billion conversion cost for digital television over the next 10 years, with householders bearing the bulk of the expense. AC Nielsen Australia also foreshadowed that digital TV would give Australia's free-to-air networks an "enormous" competitive advantage over the print media. It expected TV advertising revenues to double to \$5 billion a year during the next decade. Australian households could expect to pay about \$3,500 for a digital TV set by the time the technology was introduced in 2001.

Pay TV

When the annual TV ratings war began in February, pay TV was part of the equation for the first time. An estimated 900,000 Australian homes were now connected to pay TV.

In June Cable & Wireless Optus struck a new deal with its Hollywood studios that will save it between \$250 million and \$300 million over the next six years. The deal opened the way for C&W Optus's studios to sell move product to Optus's prime competitor, Foxtel, if it so wished. The deal also gave C&W Optus a substantial cost advantage over Foxtel, which paid its Hollywood studios more per subscriber. Foxtel itself had renegotiated its program-supply arrangements in August to save at least \$3.1 billion on its programming costs over the next 23 years.

In the December half-year C&W Optus slashed its loss from \$83.6 million to \$66.3 million and revealed that it was "firmly on target" to meet full-year prospectus forecasts. It reported a full-year profit of \$113.1 million after having added almost \$1 billion in sales in the final quarter. Although the newly-floated Austar United Communications posted a net loss for the three months to June of \$61.7 million and a half-year loss of \$128.6 million, Austar CEO John Porter expected to meet subscriber forecasts for the full calendar year.

Television news

Ray Martin announced in November that he was stepping down as host of Nine's *A Current Affair* and did so a night later. Mike Munro replaced him. In the first half of 1999 Martin's main appearances were as the presenter and narrator of the Sunday night flashback program, *Our Century*.

At year's end, Seven was taking legal action in the Supreme Court against Nine for claiming to be Perth's "leading" news station. Unlike its network affiliates in other capitals, Nine news was outrated in Perth by Seven. Seven was attracting an average audience of 214,000 and Nine, 142,000.

The TV current affairs report that created more newspaper headlines than any other was Paul Lyneham's *60 Minutes* segment on 21 March about Paul Keating and his former interests in piggeries. Lyneham reported that documents showed that Keating, as Prime Minister, had repeatedly misled Parliament about his involvement in

the piggery business he bought in 1991. The documents allegedly showed that Keating had received more than \$4 million as he progressively sold his share of the business to Danish and Indonesian interests — a figure much greater than Keating had publicly declared. The documents also allegedly showed that Keating had colluded with his former business partner, Al Constantinidis, to disguise the real return on his original \$430,000 investment, through a complex web of business and legal transactions. They further showed, allegedly, that Keating and the Commonwealth Bank were involved in a deal in 1998 to ensure Constantinidis kept silent on the details. Lyneham followed up a week later with more allegations, denied by Keating.

The Sydney Olympics

The Olympic Games, for most people, is either a media event, or a non-event. The news media were active in the year under review in exposing the methods by which various cities have won their Games bids. But the news media themselves were intricately involved in the build-up to the Sydney Olympics in 2000, with key executives serving on organising committees and media organisations involved in sponsorship deals.

SOCOG (the Sydney Organising Committee for the Olympic Games) sold Rupert Murdoch's Australian newspapers exclusive information about Olympic tickets and the Olympic torch relay as part of a sponsorship deal. In the weeks before tickets to events at the Sydney Olympic Games went on sale, organisers suppressed information about how the tickets could be bought because of the deal — obviously aimed at lifting the circulation of News Ltd newspapers. At the beginning of May SOCOG asserted that the only way to buy tickets, which went on sale on 30 May, was to buy a copy of a News Ltd newspaper. Yet it was known that SOCOG already had in place wider distribution plans for the ticket-ordering booklet. The Australian Press Council and the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance expressed concern over the SOCOG/News Ltd deal. The IOC (International Olympic Committee) announced it would examine the deal.

Sydney's Olympic bid organisers offered excessive gifts, holidays, scholarships and jobs to IOC members and some of their relatives in breach of IOC guidelines, an inquiry into the bid found in March. About 15 IOC members and sports official breached guidelines by accepting side trips to Paris, Bangkok and other destinations on their way to and from Sydney, breaking the five-day visit limit. The inquiry was conducted by Tom Sheridan, the South Australian auditor-general. The chief operating officer of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, A.D. Frazier, said the news media also expected first-class treatment. SOCOG said it would cost \$58 million to provide for accredited representatives of newspapers and news agencies at the Sydney Games. This amount included \$23 million for building the main press centre, \$10 million for staffing the centre, \$10 million in subsidies for office space and \$15 million in subsidies for accommodation at the main village. International broadcast networks balked at the prices announced in November for accommodation in the media village: \$250 a night.

In May SOCOG bowed to pressure from Rupert Murdoch's Fox Studios and shifted the road cycling races from Moore Park (Fox's front door) to Bankstown. Fox had calculated its losses at \$6 million for a five-day shutdown of film making if the road races had stayed at Moore Park.

News media people

- Australian Consolidated Press appointed former SMH editor-in-chief **John Alexander** as group publisher of ACP's specialist titles in August.
- **Sean Dorney**, the ABC's long-time correspondent in Port Moresby, returned to Australia at the close of 1998 to become Radio Australia's Brisbane-based Pacific correspondent in 1999. He served in Port Moresby on and off for a total of about 18 years from 1974.
- **Ellen Fanning**, the ABC's Washington correspondent, joined the Nine Network's *60 Minutes* program in November.

- **Don Smith** retired in January after an “extended innings” as managing editor of the *West Australian* and half a century in journalism. He began his career as a cadet on the *Kalgoorlie Miner* in 1949 at the age of 16, joining the *West Australian* 10 years later as a police roundsman. He made his name as a political writer and for his advocacy of the development of resources in WA, particularly iron ore. He retired as editor at the age of 55 but when Rupert Murdoch bought the paper, he recalled Smith, telling him he was “too young to sit on the veranda”.
- **Brian Naylor** ended 20 years as the face of Channel Nine’s Melbourne news on 12 November. He worked in broadcasting for 42 years. Peter Hitchener, 52, replaced him.
- Sacked *Witness* TV reporter **Graham Davis** settled two bitter court battles with the Seven Network for nearly \$1 million in October, with the network withdrawing any imputation against him of misconduct. Davis, sacked in April 1997 for alleged misconduct, had sought damages before the NSW Industrial Relations Commission for the loss of two two-year contracts, loss of reputation and loss of job opportunities.
- **Pamela Williams**, national correspondent for the *Australian Financial Review*, won the 1998 Graham Perkin Award for Australian Journalist of the Year. Commended were Michael Leunig, Michael Gordon and John Sylvester, all of *The Age*, and Patrick Walters, of *The Australian*. In the 1998 Walkley Awards, **Williams** won the Gold Walkley, for her investigative report of the waterfront dispute, “The plan to smash a union”. She was chosen from the 29 category winners at the 43rd Walkleys presentation. The individual category that Williams won was for investigative reporting. **Maurie Ferry**, of ABC South East Radio, Bega, was honoured for the most outstanding contribution to journalism, and **Laurie Oakes**, of the Nine Network, for journalistic leadership.

Other Walkleys went to:

Print — News report, Gary Hughes and Gerard Ryle, *Age*, (“The secret police”); three headings, Julian Stuart, *SMH*; best newspaper feature, Gary Linnell, *Sunday Life!* (“Hope lives there”); cartoon, Rod Clement, *AFR* (“Scab”); artwork, Tony Edwards, *Good Weekend* (“Hanna I hardly knew you”); information graphics of digital photo illustration, Will Pearce, *SMH*, (“Winter Olympics”); news photograph, Adam Pretty, *SMH*; feature photograph, Patrick Hamilton, *Australian*; sports photograph, David Gray, Reuters (“No need to cry”);

Radio — News report, Sean Dorney, ABC (“PNG tidal wave 1-2-3-4”); current affairs report, David Spicer, *PM*, ABC (“War on the waterfront”); feature, documentary or broadcast special, John Shovelan, ABC (“Yangtse voyage”).

Television — News report, Michael Brissenden and Max Uechritz, ABC News, (“Skate tapes”); current affairs report [less than 15 minutes] Geoff Thompson, *7.30 Report*, ABC (“Sakshi who?”); current affairs report, feature, documentary or special [more than 15 minutes], Belinda Hawkins, *Insight*, SBS (“Kicking the dust: the Wik people”); cinematography, Lawrence McManus, *Australian Story*, ABC (“A cold wind in August”).

General — Business reporting, Christine Lacy *AFR* (“Crown Casino”); coverage of suburban and regional affairs, Heather Stewart and Peter Quinn on behalf of the Territory Stateline team, ABC TV, Darwin (“Katherine flood special”); investigative reporting, Pamela Williams, *AFR* (“The plan to smash a union”); indigenous affairs, John Millard, *Australian Story*, ABC-TV (“Camilla’s conversion”); coverage of sport, Alan Attwood, *Age/SMH* (“The rise of Rafter: US Open 1997”); electronic journalism, Sarah Stewart and Jack Taylor, Agence France-Presse (“PNG Tsunami disaster”); commentary, analysis, reviews and opinion, Tony Stephens, *SMH*; in broadcast presenting, Jim Waley, *Nightline/Sunday*, Nine Network; coverage of Asia, Mark Davis, *Foreign Correspondent*, ABC-TV (“North Korea famine”); commentary, analysis and opinion, Ross Coulthart, *Sunday*, Nine

Network (“Pauline Hanson and the media”); broadcast presenting, Maxine McKew, *Lateline*, ABC; reviews or critique, Valerie Lawson, *SMH/AFR* (“Dance reviews and critique”).

Obituaries

Following is an alphabetical list of key news-media identities who died in 1998-99:

Adams, David, died 18/10/98, aged 90; editor of *The Bulletin*, 1948-60; joined the magazine in 1927 as assistant to the financial editor; appointed a director in 1934 and revived and expanded the famous “Business, Robbery, etc.” column which became well known in the 1930s for its exposure of commercial malpractices, especially in Sydney.

Auld, Elizabeth (“Lizzie”), died 31/10/98, aged 97; journalist for 50 years, mainly for the *Herald*, Melbourne (she was its first female London correspondent), the *Australian* and, in Melbourne, Canberra and London, for *Woman’s Day*. Retired age 74 when she was Melbourne correspondent for the Martin Collins column in the *Australian*. Began as a proofreader at the *Register*, Adelaide, in 1918.

Buttrose, Charles Oswald, died 3/6/99, aged 89; director of publicity and concerts, ABC, 1957-65; ABC’s North American representative in New York, 1965-71; assistant general manager, 1971-74, during which period he lost the battle to preview what was appearing on the contentious current affairs program, *This Day Tonight*. Entered journalism on Adelaide News and later worked for the Melbourne *Herald*, the *Sun News-Pictorial*, the *SMH*, the *Daily Mirror* and the *Daily Telegraph* where he became chief editorial writer. Father of Ita, journalist and magazine editor.

Bennier, Frank, died 14/10/98, aged 78; newspaper cartoonist who always signed his name Benier and always wore a Basque beret because of his heritage; became copy boy on the Adelaide *News*, but was shifted to the processing department when he divulged his artistic ambitions; shifted to Sydney *Sun* in 1958 where his mentor was Emile Mercier; left in 1973 to join *Daily Mirror* and also worked for *Sunday Telegraph* after it became part of News Ltd; first of all Bennier was a painter whose bush landscapes had “the naked loneliness, the searing, hot colours of outback Australia”.

Crivelli, Roger Leo, died Aug./Sept. 1998, aged 91; graduated in commerce and arts; joined the *Argus*, Melbourne, in 1932, as a journalist writing about the stock exchange and mining; joined SMH 1939 as a leader writer, sometimes doubling as financial editor; joined the infant Australian Atomic Energy Commission as commercial manager in 1955; later became its director of information services with responsibility for public relations activities.

Colless, John Malcolm, died April 1999, aged 83; distinguished correspondent for Australian Associated Press during Korean War; began work at *SMH* as a cadet reader before joining Australian Army in World War II; achieved

distinction as a lieutenant commanding an artillery unit in the Battle of Mubo, against the invading Japanese in New Guinea; spent final 14 years of his career as chief public relations officer and director of publications for the NSW Chamber of Manufactures.

Edwards, Ken, died 24/10/98, aged 47; began journalism career in Kingaroy, had stints on *South China Morning Post*, Hong Kong, freelancing in Laos, Thailand and Malaysia in the mid-seventies, and later senior editing posts on the *Australian* and the *Age*. A lecturer in journalism at the University of Queensland in the 1980s. In 1994 became editor of *Time's* Australian and New Zealand edition; resigned 1997 to write fiction. Renowned for his ability to write easy-to-read articles about complex topics; won a United Nations Media Peace Prize in 1988.

Flaherty, Doug, died 16/7/98, aged 65; editor in Brisbane of the *Sunday Mail*, 1979-83, and *Telegraph*, 1983-88; began career sweeping floors at the Melbourne *Truth* at age 16; worked for *Launceston Examiner*, the *Australian*, and London's *Daily Mail* before being appointed editor of Sydney's *Daily Mirror*; later edited *Newsday* in Melbourne, and Singapore's *New Nation*.

Gillison, Joan, died 15/5/99, aged 93; as Joan Finlason, she graduated in arts at University of Melbourne; joined *The Age*, 1928, refusing to work on the social pages; appointed editor of substantial women's section of the weekly rural supplement, *The Leader*; pen name was Viola and she often wrote a whole (illustrated) page that addressed the conce of the countrywomen of Victoria, southern NSW and Tasmania; married *The Argus* journalist Douglas Gillison in 1931; continued to work full-time after the arrival of three children; also wrote scripts for talks department of ABC radio; wrote four books related to Australia, its history and its culture, including *Wool and Ships*.

Joel, Asher, died 9/11/98, aged 86; newspaper proprietor and publicist *extraordinaire*; joined *Daily Telegraph* as a copy boy, in 1937 he was publicity director for the King George VI Coronation Celebrations and the 1938 Sesquicentenary celebrations for the founding of white settlement in Australia; 20 years later was organiser of Sydney's annual Waratah Spring Festival; organised Royal visits, etc; founder and chairman of Asher Joel Media Group, which included the daily *North-West Star*, Mount Isa, and a stable of industry publications from mining to construction.

King, Graham, died 25/5/99, aged 68; outstanding marketer of newspapers over three decades; masterminded the News Corp advertising campaign that drove the circulation of London's *Sun* newspaper from 800,000 to 4.5 million; regarded as the inventor of modern newspaper promotion; grew up in Australia during the 1930s depression; first worked for Murdoch at NWS9, Adelaide, and moved to Sydney when Murdoch bought the *Daily Mirror*; developed there in the fierce circulations wars with the Fairfaxes and the Packers the techniques he would employ in London.

McKinnon, Barry, died 18/4/99, aged 57; award-winning newspaper photographer; career of 42 years began at *Daily Telegraph*; quickly established himself in an era when photographers not only took the pictures but also

developed and printed them, and then presented their best selection to the editors; won Walkley Award in 1989; covered everything from crime to sport to Royal tours.

Meyer, Athol, died 31/7/98, aged 57; journalist and politician; born Dunedin, NZ; began career on *Otago Daily Times*, joined ABC and was posted to Hobart; worked in England; rejoined ABC, posted to Port Moresby and then Kuala Lumpur; appointed chief of staff, Hobart, 1972; resigned end of 70s to become farmer; became Tasmanian branch secretary of AJA; elected to Tasmanian Legislative Council.

Molnar, George, died 16/11/98, aged 88; cartoonist, artist and academic architect; born in Hungary; began cartooning for the *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, 1945, the year he began lecturing in architecture at the University of Sydney; switched to the *SMH* in 1953; continued to cartoon and lecture for next 32 years; awarded OBE, 1971, and AO, 1988, for services to journalism and architecture.

Murray, Douglas Clifford, died 27/12/98, aged 86; editor, *Northern Star*, Lismore, 1949-77; his trainees included Phillip Knightley, Olga Masters, John Hepworth and Roger East; joined *Star* in 1935 to help gain cadetship at *SMH*, but never left the Lismore paper; renowned for strong, well-balanced editorials and his ability to work long hours under extreme pressure.

Muszkat, Peter Julian, died 30/4/99, aged 64; distinguished sports writer for *Daily Mirror*, Sydney; began as cadet on *SMH*; covered several Kangaroo Rugby League tours of Great Britain and France for *Mirror*; also worked in public relations.

Neal, Reg, died 14/11/98, aged 87; broadcaster; ordained as an Anglican priest in Adelaide in 1936; joined ABC 1944 as an announcer; moved to Melbourne as a talks officer in 1950 (talks covered what would now be classified as current affairs); participated in the process that helped programs such as *This Day Tonight* and *Four Corners* to emerge from the talks department; hosted some of the early TV shows, including *Panorama* and *The Critics' Program*.

Newfong, John Archibald, died 30/5/99, aged 55; journalist and activist; first Aborigine employed as a journalist in mainstream print media; joined *Australian* after serving as campaign secretary of the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Straits Islanders during the 1967 referendum on Aborigines; later worked for *SMH* and reported overseas — from Paris the election of President Pomidou, and from Uganda; key figure in success of the first Aboriginal tent embassy on the lawns of Parliament House, Canberra; became general secretary of FCAATSI in 1970.

Nelson, Janice Adeline, died Nov. 1999, aged 53; first public information officer in the Australian judicial system; travelled widely overseas as young married woman; teacher; worked as legal journalist on the *Gazette of Law and Journalism* and the *Federal Court Reporter*; appointed public information officer for NSW Supreme Court, 1993.

Reeder, Joan, died May 1999, aged 76; editor of *Woman's Day* for 18 years; obtained clerical job at *Daily Telegraph* and shifted into journalism by running the department the syndicated *Telegraph* material Australia-wide; in London joined central desk at headquarters of Reuter's news agency and was soon in charge of supplying the American subscribers; after stint on Sydney's *Sun* became *Woman's Day* editor.

Richardson, John, died Nov. 1998, aged 66; newspaper editor; joined *Singleton Argus* as a cadet; worked on *Newcastle Sun* and *Daily Telegraph* before being appointed editor of *Maitland Mercury*; joined Fairfax group in June 1964, launching the weekly *Canberra Courier* as managing editor; executive editor, *Illawarra Mercury*, Wollongong, 1967-78; editorial manager, Fairfax's Sydney operations.

Riddell, Elizabeth Richmond, died 3/7/98, aged 91; poet and journalist; left native New Zealand to join Sydney's *Daily Mirror* and *Truth* at age 18; covered everything from theatre, ballet and films to politics and police rounds; served in France as a war correspondent in latter part of World War II after establishing New York bureau for *Mirror*; did some of her best work on *The Australian* as feature writer, critic and sometime literary editor.

Ringwood, Anne Margaret, died Sept. 1998, in Sydney, aged 74; ABC radio news journalist for 35 years; originated and produced for 21 years the respected program, *Report from Asia*; began at 16 on *Border Morning Mail*, Albury, because most of the men had gone to war; later joined *Daily Advertiser*, Wagga Wagga, and *SMH* where she was the only woman on the general reporting staff; distinguished herself in her foreign reporting; always had to battle entrenched male chauvinism in the news media.

Roche, John, died 9/5/99, aged 58; highly regarded sub-editor; joined *Daily Mercury*, Mackay, *Daily Telegraph*, Sydney, *Livestock Bulletin* and *Ringwood Mail*, Vic., *Courier-Mail*, Brisbane, and *Age*, Melbourne.

Ross, Dorothy, died 13/10/98, aged 70; founding public member of Australian Press Council, vice-chairman, 1977-85, and 1987-97; national president of Country Women's Association, 1985-88; ran farm at Holbrook, southern NSW.

Rust, William, died 9/1/99, aged 71; journalist and unionist; worked for *Adelaide Advertiser*, 1945-82 after two years as a copy boy; active member and senior officer in AJA.

White, David Albert, died April 1999 in Sydney, aged 58; began career as cadet at *SMH*, became general reporter, sub-editor, foreign correspondent, leader writer and news executive; first *SMH* resident correspondent in Papua New Guinea, 1965; undertook media roles in the resurgent Whitlam Labor party of the 1970s; joined SBS in 1990 as executive producer of the current affairs program, *Tonight*, and later of the flagship, *Dateline*; helped establish the network as a producer of quality Australian programs; predeceased by his brother, Brian, the broadcaster.

Internet

By Kerry Green

This was the year in which many more Australian media institutions got their acts together and got on the web. Since the release of the first graphical web browser, Mosaic, in 1993 had kick-started the commercial rush to the web, Australian media had been conspicuous by their lack of interest and lack of presence. And while Australia has not yet approached the ubiquity of US media on the web, the major Australian players have at last shown some glimmering of understanding about the opportunities and exigencies the web poses, with Fairfax's websites and content leading the way and News Ltd's also improving. In broadcast media, NineMSN acquired a strong recognition factor, but the ABC Online was the undoubted market leader and innovator, with streaming audio and video technology bringing a far greater variety of content to the web than previously.

Traditional media around the world, and in Australia in particular, enlarged their web presences (not in a spirit of innovation, but in an atmosphere of fear), as new players such as Yahoo! added classified advertising to their search engine and web directory services. In mid-1998, as Yahoo! and other major gateways decided to become content providers by adding advertising — usually for free — to their sites, traditional media realised they had to respond by upgrading their homepages from token web presences to useful sites that provided all the gateways could provide, and more. This also was the year that gave us the terms 'portal' (Yahoo!, Excite, Lycos become recognised entry points for other services and brand names) and 'vertical portal' (a company attempts to become the recognised entry point for a particular service, such as music, sport, finance). Newspapers attempted to combat the threat to their advertising revenue by producing geographical vertical portals in the US, with newspapers combining their classifieds databases to provide audiences with comprehensive cover of a specific region or regions. In Australia, News Ltd's online classified service, allowing searches of the company's publications by state or type, attempts to achieve the same blanket coverage.

This also was the year that told us Internet audiences resist paid subscription to online publications. The message came through loud and clear when an online publishing pioneer, the *San Jose Mercury News's* Mercury Centre, decided to drop its monthly subscription rate (of less than \$5). Month1®—Daffic rose from about 6 million page views up to about 11 million page views and the additional traffic and the ad revenue it produced have made up for the amount of lost subscription revenue. Online book seller Amazon.com also discovered public resistance to fees, although in this case book publishers, rather than readers, were being charged. Amazon.com decides in February this year to allow publishers to buy space in their editorial recommendations areas, but not to label them as having been paid for. The resultant outcry about editorial integrity forced the company to distinguish between paid-for recommendations and those written by Amazon.com's staff and freelance reviewers.

The year under review also showed just how powerful the net can be, with Kenneth Starr's report on President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky released first on the Internet. Online media columnist Steve Outing, in Editor and Publisher Interactive, said web publishing meant audiences got information faster, although quality and accuracy suffered, and more unseen issues got covered as the relationship between audience member and journalist became closer. The closer relationship is being fostered not only by the capacity to talk to each other via email and chat lines, but also by the capacity for audience members to self-publish and, in effect, "become" the reporter.

At least two other issues also demanded attention: micropayments and content branding. Micropayments for a short period seemed to be the way to make a buck out of (non-porn) online publishing. It proposes sites consist of areas that provide free content and services and areas where the content must be paid for. Visitors to the paid-for sections of a site would be charged a small amount each time they clicked on the section. The charges from a variety of sites would be aggregated into a single monthly account (perhaps administered by credit card providers or banks). The theory was that site visitors would

not object to minuscule charges of, say, 5¢ for content that was useful to them. The theory, however, seems to have sunk without trace as audiences continue to resist charges for content.

Branding developed into a complex area of debate over the past year as some content providers agreed to their content being provided within the brand frame of other providers — prompting arguments about misleading site visitors — while yet other content providers have complained that their work has simply been misappropriated. The issue has become more contentious in the past year as Win98, with its IE web browser, became more ubiquitous, giving more website visitors the capacity to view sites built with frames.

As the period moved into the second half of 1999, the industry was just beginning to contemplate the implications of “wearable” computers for reporters and the latest version of the online “tablet” — capable of being taken to “bathroom”, as our US colleagues so delicately put it.

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Australian journalism research index 1992-99

Anna Day

This is an index of Australian journalism and news media-related articles and books from 1992 onwards. The index is in two main parts: a listing by author, and a listing by subject matter in which an article may appear a number of times. Multi-author articles are listed by each author. To advise of errors or omissions, or to have new material included in the next edition, please contact Anna Day at anna.day@mailbox.uq.edu.au

Source journals

(AsianJC) Asian Journal of Communication.

(AJC) Australian Journal of Communication. Published by the School of Communication and Organisations Studies and the Communication Centre, Queensland University of Technology; edited by Roslyn Petelin. Address: c/- Roslyn Petelin, School of Communication and Organisational Studies, Faculty of Business, Queensland University of Technology, GPO Box 2434, Brisbane, Qld 4001.

(AJR) Australian Journalism Review. Published by the Journalism Education Association; edited by Lawrence Apps of the Curtin University School of Communication and Cultural Studies, PO Box U1987, Perth WA, 6001. Phone: (09) 351 3247. Fax: (09) 351 7726.

(ASJ) Australian Studies in Journalism. Published by the Department of Journalism at the University of Queensland; edited by Professor John Henningham. Founded 1992. Address: Department of Journalism, University of Queensland, 4072. Phone: (07) 3365 2060. Fax: (07) 3365 1377.

(BJR) British Journalism Review. Published by British Journalism Review Publishing Ltd, a non-profit making company.

(CJC) Canadian Journal of Communication. Published by Wildrid Laurier University Press for the non-profit Canadian Journal of Communication Corporation, and is a collaborative venture between the Centre for Policy Research on Science and Technology and the Canadian Centre for Studies in Publishing; edited by Rowland Lorimer of the School of Communication, Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., Canada.

- (CP) The Contemporary Pacific.** Published twice a year by the Centre for Pacific Islands Studies, University of Hawai'i Press.
- (EJC) Electronic Journal of Communication/La Revue Electronique de Communication.**
- IPI Report.** The magazine of the International Press Institute. Headquarters: Wydlerweg 10, 8047 Zurich, Switzerland.
- (JME) Journal of Media Economics.**
- (JQ) Journalism Quarterly.** [Now *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*] Published by the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, in cooperation with the Association of Schools of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of South Carolina, Columbia, USA.
- (MC&S) Media, Culture & Society.** Published by Sage Publications, London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi. Quarterly.
- (MIA) Media Information Australia.** [Now *Media International Australia*] Published by the Australian Film Television & Radio School; edited by Stuart Cunningham, Murray Goot, Elizabeth Jacka, John Sinclair, Rodney Tiffen, Peter B. White. Address: Cnr Balaclava and Epping Rds, North Ryde, NSW (PO Box 126, North Ryde, NSW, 2113). Phone: (02) 805 6611.
- Metro.** Published by Australian Teachers of Media (ATOM), with assistance from the Australian Film commission and Film Victoria; edited by Peter Tapp. Address: PO Box 204, Albert Park, Victoria, 3206. Phone: (03) 9525 5302. Fax: (03) 9537 2325.
- (WJR) Washington Journalism Review.** Changed to *American Journalism Review* in 1993. Published monthly by the College of Journalism of the University of Maryland at College Park, USA, through the University of Maryland Foundation.

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Book reviews

Fit to Print: Inside the Canberra Press Gallery

Margaret Simons

Sydney: UNSW Press, 1999, vii + 118pp.

It's a brave person who chooses to write about the Canberra press gallery. Almost by definition, that person must come from outside the gallery, because no insider would take on the task. That would be telling tales out of school, writing an unfavourable account of one's family. It would be a certain recipe for ostracism. This is because the gallery behaves like a family or a club. While members of the gallery, like any family, may criticise each other, they will unite to ward off a perceived slight from the outside. Like a family, too, the gallery assumes a certain homogeneity among its members. Those who count themselves as members of the press gallery assume that they do the same work, file the same stories. They attend the same media events; they constantly monitor each other's output; they constantly discuss the meaning of events and utterances. They get a little jealous if some member has beaten them to a story. In the case of a scoop they may file a follow-up or, as Simons points out, go out of their way to downplay the story. They congratulate each other on "a good story"; they're flattered if a politician comments favourably on a story.

The gallery reporters trounced Margaret Simons when her first chapter appeared as an essay in *Eureka St* last year, but, unperturbed, she continued with her commission to produce a gentle, perceptive and impressionistic account of the gallery, an account that has the ring of truth. She nonchalantly dealt with the gallery backlash by reporting it in her second chapter. *Fit to Print* is a curious blend of Simons' own history and family circumstances with observations, anecdotes, informal conversations and bookish knowledge about the gallery and reporting. On her own admission she is on the outside of this "aquarium" (p.31), trying to figure out how life happens on the inside. Or, to invoke another metaphor, she is like Alice working out the ways of Wonderland, and no more so than when she is trying to

find the door that leads to the actual gallery, the dress circle from which reporters watch the daily political dramas played out below (p.29). In this instance she had no white rabbit for guidance, but she did find the door by herself.

One of the things that Simons' book does for me is to chart the progress of the gallery in the new Parliament House. She fills the gaps in my knowledge of the institution since I left it in 1986. She confirms my own impressions: gallery reporters hunt their news in a pack; they feed on the same gossip; they are still sensitive to criticism; they don't tolerate difference easily. She informs me, too, that in some ways things have become worse. In the old Parliament House, junior reporters used to mill around the front and ministerial entrances waiting for the chance to doorstep politicians; now the doorstops are organised as formally as press conferences. The turn-around-time for stories is shorter than it used to be and the political editors in the capital cities are less enthralled with Canberra than they once were, and all this says to me that the gallery reporters are even less likely to be reflective about what they're writing than they were in my day.

In all, *Fit to Print* reads like an eye-witness account of the eclipse of the Canberra press gallery. One of Simons' assertions is that the public is no longer interested in things political and, moreover, politicians can now sidestep the gallery. It used to be that the gallery was the major conduit between the public and the parliament — or, at least, that was the illusion — but these days politicians can bypass the gallery by appearing on talkback radio or by posting their own site on the Internet. On Simons' account, it seems ted hough reporters no longer have direct access to politicians. Any interaction is by way of minders, staged events and transcripts from some pre-recorded interview for the broadcast media. Gone are the days when polities and journos gossiped over a cold drink at the end of the day in the non-members' bar or chatted amicably during breaks in some parliamentary inquiry or in the corridors. And as for the public, if it has lost interest the gallery would scarcely notice, because gallery reporters for too long have regarded politicians and other gallery journalists as their primary audience. Simons suggests that the gallery is responsible for its own demise. It seems its journalists have written

themselves into a corner by distancing the reader from the action of politics, by indulging in “Canberra-speak”, or insider’s shorthand (p.63). She seems to advocate that the journalists spend more time writing about policy developments in plain language and less time writing about the theatrics and the personalities of parliament. Or does she? Consider this:

Reporting increases the distance between what governments actually do — their policies and actions in the world “out there” — and the way the game of politics is played. Perhaps on second thoughts, the underlying factor is not an increasing distance, just less policy and more game. The game becomes everything, and appearance becomes reality. On third thoughts, perhaps it’s more that we just can’t tell. If the media reports only the way the game is played, how are we to know whether the serious policy work, the serious intellectual work of governance, is going on somewhere else, out of view? Or not going on? We don’t know. We can’t know. We don’t know what is going on. Most of the time, we haven’t got the language to formulate the necessary questions. (pp.65-66)

Simons argues, too, that gallery reporters should adopt the “innocent eye” that would help them to write with clarity and hope, rather than infusing their writing with characteristic cynicism. For this recommended remedy to the gallery malaise, Laurie Oakes (who refused to talk to Simons) offered the following as a cautionary tale to a MEAA forum. Take Tim Fischer’s retirement: he used an interview on the Sunday program on 6 June to put down quite firmly the “silly reports” that he planned to retire as National Party leader. Now hardly anyone in the press gallery reported it, and when I asked why, the typical answer was “because we don’t believe him”. I got on my high horse and said: “Maybe you don’t believe him, but whether that’s the case or not, you should still report what he says.” They gave me a strange look. A couple of weeks later, Alan Ramsey accompanied Fischer on a trip to Mildura and Deniliquin. Fischer used that trip to convince Ramsey that he wasn’t retiring. The result was a column headline “Tim’s in no rush to go bush”, and Ramsey wrote: “The press simply won’t believe Fischer. No matter how many times he denies he plans to quit, either from politics or the leadership, there’s always somebody who goes on asking him the same threadbare question.” So Ramsey and Oakes, the two grumpy old men of the press gallery, applied the

innocent eye. Our younger, less experienced colleagues used the know-it-all eye. And who looked silly in the end when Fischer announced his retirement four days after Ramsay's column? (*Background Briefing*, 15/5/99, Radio National)

So much for the innocent eye. Beyond these suggestions for change and a passing hint that gallery journalists could do with further education, Simons offers no other prescription to rescue political journalism. If these are her best suggestions, then it would be helpful to thrash out just how political reporters might write about policy developments in a meaningful way that did not bore the pants off readers. This is where Simons and I part company. I want a serious book that tackles such issues in a thorough way. I want a sustained and vigorous argument on how political journalism might be reinvented. I want a sustained discussion on the role of the media in a political democracy. I would want to challenge her assertion that voters have lost interest in federal politics; at least I want to have her defend that proposition. I want to have her ask the leading journalists about the merits of reporting policy and have her facilitate that debate. I want to know why the current generation of gallery reporters thinks that it is qualified to interpret the news from Canberra. I want to know to whom they listen, by whom they are guided in assessing the important news of the day. I want, in short, an insider's account of how gallery reporters spend their day.

An insider might have accompanied reporters to the parliamentary library, the clerk of the house, the tables office, to parliamentary inquiries. I want to eavesdrop as the reporters talk to bureaucrats; I want to see them dissecting and making sense of a government report or the budget papers. I want, in short, denser information. I would have liked to see Simons consult other books on journalism beyond the *Faber Book of Reportage* (1997), Sally White (1991) and Julianne Schultz (1998). Some James Carey, John Dewey or even Walter Lippmann would be useful to any discussion about reforming journalism, reforming political communication. Don't get me wrong: *Fit to Print* is a very fine introduction to the Canberra press gallery. But it is only a starting point, and it should be treated as such. It would be wonderful to see some journalism school — the University of Canberra

is perfectly positioned — at last offer a detailed course on political communication, if not journalism, that would examine democratic theory, organisational communication and sociology, administrative law and all the other bits of knowledge that help to explain the complex workings of the federal government, and then we might begin to talk about how we improve the reporting of such things. *Fit to Print* might be used as an initial exploration in such a course.

— **Kitty Eggerking**

Charles Sturt University, Bathurst

Off the Rails: The Pauline Hanson Trip

Margo Kingston

Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999 xix + 243pp. \$22.95

Off the Rails is Margo Kingston's diary of the 1998 federal election campaign, or at least the part of it that involved her the most. Kingston is a senior political journalist for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, working from the Canberra press gallery, and for the four weeks of the 1998 election campaign period she was a virtual shadow to Pauline Hanson. Kingston copped a lot of flak for her role in the One Nation campaign. Many of her journalist colleagues in the press gallery and beyond were quick to blame her whenever there was an "incident" on the campaign trail (and there were plenty). At the same time, Kingston's unconventional style also got up the noses of "Pauline's People" — the disaffected One Nation supporters for whom Pauline Hanson represented salvation. And, as Kingston readily admits at several stages in the book, she sometimes blurred the lines that are supposed to separate candidates from their media "watchers". The first incident occurred in the first week when Victorian Premier Jeff Kennett "happened" to be in the southern Queensland city of Toowoomba at the same time as Pauline Hanson. Kingston found herself in a position to convince Hanson that she should meet with Kennett, who had "pledged to chase Hanson down every burrow" (p.33): "I took her aside. "Look, this is look-you-in-the-eye advice. It's good for you to meet Kennett. It's the big bad Southerner thing — it doesn't matter that you chase him down." (p.34)

It's unlikely that the Hanson-Kennett meeting would have happened without this intervention from the reporter. Kingston justifies this by suggesting that not confronting Kennett in Queensland would make Hanson look "so politically stupid as to be beyond belief, as well as torpedoing a good story" (p.34). This is a value judgment that would not necessarily be shared by everyone: Kennett had vowed to destroy Hanson. What could she possibly hope to gain from a "chance" meeting in a suburban shopping centre? It's clear from Kingston's account that Pauline Hanson came to rely on her media shadows, particularly when the more senior One Nation apparatchiks were out of their political depth (which was just about every day).

As the campaign progressed several things became clear to Kingston and the other reporters with Hanson full time: One Nation was no ordinary political machine, David Oldfield was a sleazy political operative, the party rank and file were poorly organised and ill-informed, Pauline Hanson was naive and gullible. These themes are reinforced through Kingston's recreation of the day-by-day mayhem of the One Nation campaign, from Longreach, to Launceston to Perth and all points in between.

At times Pauline Hanson appears in the book as an isolated figurehead: lonely and deliberately kept in the dark by her Svengali-like minder David Oldfield — who refers to Hanson as the "product". At other times she appears confident, bright and almost cheerfully resigned to the ineptitude of those around her. Kingston makes much of the disorganisation in the One Nation camp and the reader is left with the feeling that plain incompetence was a major factor in Hanson's poor showing in the ballot nationally. "With One Nation, you were in the same bar where the minders were working it out, amid Oldfield's running commentary on all his colleagues' limitations. Hanson's campaign was post-modern — text was meaningless, she was all over the shop; everything was personal, everything was subjective, and the journalist was both prisoner to her mood and controller of it. But just as the campaign seemed to be settling into a mutual understanding of sorts, it all fell apart." (p.109)

Off the Rails is a compelling and easy read and Kingston's honest appraisal of her own "role" in the One Nation campaign is refreshingly

reflexive. Though there is no rounding off, no final assessment of whether through her conscious and unconscious interventions Margo Kingston did or did not make a difference to the fortunes of Pauline Hanson. I for one am a very firm supporter of Kingston's reporting of the Hanson campaign. Almost in spite of her very humanistic empathy with Pauline the person, Kingston never loses sight of the ugly side of One Nation, particularly as embodied by David Oldfield, with whom she spars on a regular basis. I also support Kingston personally in the way she handled the confrontations with Hanson, Oldfield, One Nation heavies and the "bonehead" element among the party faithful. I believe Kingston's intervention during the last days of the campaign, when the costings of One Nation's outrageous and ridiculous promises was refused to reporters covering the party "launch" in Ipswich, was absolutely the right thing to do. If I'd been there I would have been right by her side. She was right to call Oldfield's bluff — a threat to get the journalists arrested — and to resist his attempts at intimidation by cajoling the One Nation rank and file into attacking the media pack.

Kingston is right to critically observe how political journalism has become part of the game (p. x), but *Off the Rails* is honest enough to acknowledge how a committed and socially aware reporter can get swept up in the emotion and rhythm of the story she/he is covering. In the end Kingston's personal sympathy for Pauline Hanson did not cloud her political judgment, nor did it stop her from putting the boot in to One Nation over issues and policies. It is Kingston's passion and humanity that make her such an excellent and respected political reporter. More power to her.

— Martin Hirst

University of Western Sydney, Nepean

Reviving the Fourth Estate

Julianne Schultz

Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 304pp. \$29.95

Schultz's exploration of the nature of the "fourth estate" label has given a fitting context to considering the role of journalism in

contemporary society and the differing and changing expectations of the news media's role. The newcomer to the field as well as the journalist and journalism/media scholar can benefit from Schultz's insights and discussion.

An historical section covering developments in the United States, Britain and Australia helps to clarify the roles defined by and for journalism by politicians, political philosophers and crusading editors, and to illustrate important continuities in the debate. There is a good overview of news media styles and priorities over the last generation, showing the ebbs and flows in commitment to investigative roles.

Schultz adopts the United States modification of the "fourth estate" nomenclature, which speaks of the other estates as the familiar "three branches" of U.S. government (executive, legislature and judiciary). She doesn't make quite clear that the original concept (from Macauley/Burke) was of the press as a new grouping within the bi-cameral parliament (the other three estates being the bishops in the House of Lords, the non-episcopal lords and the House of Commons). (I must say I have never been very comfortable with the concept of the press as an additional branch of government, and nor presumably have American commentators, in that they have adopted the "estate" label. But there are dangers in importing the U.S. concept to Australia, primarily in the fact that our executive is a part of, and for the most part dominates, the legislature.)

Of interest is elaboration of the evolving applications of the "fourth estate" term: for the nineteenth century and earlier part of the twentieth century the press as an institution (and later the broadcast media) adopted the term, but in the latter part of the twentieth century its champions became working journalists rather than employers.

Much of the discussion is informed by results of a survey of journalists conducted in parallel with similar overseas surveys. I am less confident than Schultz about her mainstream sample. Limiting it to Media Alliance/AJA members (unionists) and achieving a response rate of 41 percent (245 respondents) presents obvious difficulties. It further confirms (although further confirmation should not have been

necessary) that postal surveys are an ineffective way of tapping responses from journalists.

Much interesting material from the survey is not included in the book (as is often the case with a major questionnaire), but it is helpful for the entire set of questions and frequencies to be reproduced as an appendix. Given that demographic details were obtained, it is a pity that Schultz has not explored differences between journalists' responses based on such factors as age, sex and education. She does, however, provide sustained comparisons between news and investigative journalists.

Schultz reveals that 50 percent of news journalists and 77 percent of investigative journalists consider it very important or quite important to influence the public. Similar numbers consider it important to influence public policy decisions. In conjunction with the finding which she does not highlight that journalists are more than three times as likely to "be closer to" the Labor Party than to the coalition, this is food for thought. (A large minority also indicated they were not close to any party.) Some 54 percent declared themselves as to the left of centre, compared with 13 percent to the right (68% to 5% in the case of investigative journalists.) Schultz tends to take refuge, as does Gans in the United States, in the view that journalists' commitment to professionalism and objectivity overrides any danger of ideological imbalance, yet this theory works better within the largely discarded objective journalism model than with the more participant model celebrated here.

Of interest also is the perception of journalists reported here that ABC news and current affairs programs as well as Fairfax publications are to the left of centre, while News Limited and Packer publications are right of centre. Most journalists see themselves as to the left of their own organisations and of the general public.

The primary research was conducted too early for the impact of the Internet to be a consideration, though it would have helped if Schultz had given some attention to this issue in her closing discussion. In all, however, this is a very useful volume. It inevitably carries many of the hallmarks of an academic tome (it was originally a PhD thesis)

and could have been cut back extensively in some places and rewritten and expanded in others. But it remains an intelligent analysis of news media issues of continuing importance.

— John Henningham
University of Queensland

The Trouble with Tigers

Victor Mallet

London: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999, 332pp.

A book about the Asian economics and the Asian crisis needs a catchy title, at best with the word “tiger” in there somewhere. This review deals with *The Trouble with Tigers* by journalist Victor Mallet. Out at about the same time are *Tigers Tamed* by Robert Garran, another journalist, and *Tigers in Trouble*, edited by Malaysian academic K.S. Jomo. The titles all play on that evocative image of east Asian countries as snappy, snarly beasts springing out of the jungle to surprise the world with vigour and growth. Well, that was until the economic crisis of mid-1997 revealed the tigers had paws of clay.

Victor Mallet identifies three forces for political change that south-east Asia shares with previous industrial revolutions: the rise of the middle class, resentment among the poor and a new generation of politicians. And in Asia he identifies a fourth phenomenon of particular interest to journalists and communicators: in his words “. . . the speed with which information and ideas can be transformed around the globe”. And while most governments in the region, except Thailand and the Philippines, try to restrict what their people can see, hear or read, Mallet argues they are losing the information war with the spread of information changing Asia.

Mallet, a foreign correspondent since 1981, went to Bangkok in 1992 to cover the region for London's *Financial Times*. There is no escaping the journalist in the author. Mallet's reporter's instincts are evident in his focus on ordinary people. The book opens with an account of a Cambodian woman playing an electronic Game Boy in the Angkor Wat temple. Mallet's reliance on newspapers and magazines

is clear from their prominence in the footnotes. But at the same time the bibliographic inclusion of E.J. Hobsbawm, E.P. Thompson and Francis Fukuyama reveal the Oxford-educated Mallet's scholarship.

The so-called Asian miracle of the region's economic growth and the shock of its collapse are more than "just an economic story". For Australians particularly, the 500 million people in south-east Asia are geographically and commercially close. Most of us will have a computer or other electronic item, or some clothing or shoes with a "made in Asia" stamp. We might well be working in an industry with links to Asia such as tourism, finance, mining, primary production or education. The region, too, has been a focus of Australian journalism with major coverage in recent decades of Australia's relationship with Japan, the Vietnam war, industrialisation across the region and change in China. Currently, of course, Timor and Indonesia dominate Australia's news media and events in those two places can be tied into popular unrest in 1998 caused by the economic crash.

Asia has seen the fastest industrialisation in history; achieving in decades what took the West 150 years. Or in Mallet's words: "... it is not uncommon for Asian men and women to move straight from working in the family's paddy fields to a factory producing micro-chips." Even as the boom was under way however Mallet doubted the strength of its foundations and started researching this book. He disputes any mysterious "Asian values" as the secret behind the region's success and puts it down instead to "broadly sensible economic policies" and a "favourable international climate".

Their proponents say Asian values make Asians different from Westerners in that they are hardworking and more respectful of education, family, community and government. But critics of this view, like Mallet, say Asian values are just an excuse for authoritarian leaders to deprive their populations of universal, rather than simply Western, rights. But with modernisation has come the growth of the middle class and education that has led to dissatisfaction with heavy-handed governments as well as demands from the poor who have benefited, but comparatively less than the rich, from Asia's progress.

With modernisation Asians have had to come to terms with greater freedoms and Western influences. Mallet writes that tastes, habits, languages, religious beliefs and more have changed. Drug abuse and prostitution are problems. As well there are visual aspects of Asia's change; Irish theme pubs in Phnom Penh, Michael Jackson concerts in Bangkok and US-style shopping malls in the Philippines. And Mallet also looks at the "extraordinary influence" of big business and its links to army generals and presidents. He compares them to the 19th century capitalist robber barons of the US and Britain and writes of their involvement "in everything from drug-trafficking and illegal logging to lucrative and corrupt infrastructure projects for roads and telephone lines . . . before long the drug barons and gangsters are dressed in Savile Row suits, their children are educated overseas, the family business is engaged in banking and finance and the past is all but forgotten." These corrupt links are also part of the change that has brought pollution and congestion to Asian cities and environmental damage that has stripped forests, destroyed animal habitats and poisoned rivers.

Mallet also devotes space to an outline of the ten South-east Asian nations — Burma, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei and the Philippines. Each has a very different history, most colonised by different European powers, with populations that range from 285,000 people in Brunei to almost 200 million in Indonesia, and economic progress ranging from extensive in Singapore to very limited in Burma. Mallet is optimistic about the future of the region but writes: "Big obstacles are to be overcome if the next twenty years are to be as successful as the last twenty. The biggest mistakes (Asian) leaders made in the 1990s were to try to suppress the popular urge for political and social change while boasting about their economic achievements in a mood of premature triumph."

Asian leaders were able to drive their nations to prosperity through authoritarian control. In many countries the media was — and remains — restricted. In Malaysia Mallet quotes government critic Abdul-Rahman Adnan who says, "I feel we are a bit too unfree at the moment . . . (the press) will write about corruption but they won't ask the really tough questions... the problem is that all our newspapers are owned

by the political masters.” In 1998 when Malaysia hosted the Commonwealth Games the region was covered in smoke from the out-of-control fires burning in Indonesia. But concerns about the country’s image saw the Malaysia government threaten local television stations their licences would be revoked if they used the word “haze”.

In Singapore, too, there are tight controls on the television, radio and the main newspapers. Mallet records that not only news but also films, books and arts are all subject to censorship, with theatrical scripts for example, needing approval before they can be performed. And some of the most popular books about Singapore are not available in the country itself.

Mallet quotes a celebrated case of media debate to push home his point about Singapore. American Professor Christopher Lingle wrote about the Indonesia forest fires in the *International Herald Tribune*, on 7 October 1994. In the same article Lingle discussed the problems of the region not having a free media and questioned the independence of the judiciary. When he was taken to court over the article, Lingle so feared for his freedom that he fled Singapore. Lingle later wrote: “Paranoiac control over information, rule by fear, the imposition of paternalistic dependency, intimidation of opposition politicians and an effective propaganda campaign allows Singapore’s authoritarian-capitalist regime to hide behind an unwanted pristine image.”

Since the publication of *The Trouble with Tigers*, Canadian journalist Murray Hiebert has begun a six-week jail sentence in Malaysia’s Sungei Buloh Prison. Hiebert, a correspondent for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, was found guilty of contempt of court for an article on the increasingly litigious nature of Malaysian society. He drew on a case involving the son of prominent Malaysian judge Gopal Sri Ram who challenged his exclusion from a school debating team. US President Clinton criticised the decision and said jailing a journalist for doing his job undermined the building of a democratic society.

Not only are local media outlets restrained by authoritarian regimes in Asia. Mallet recounts that self-censorship is spreading to foreign newspapers and magazines. Their owners, he says, are concerned about the costs of libel cases and the risk of restriction if they offend

governments. Both *The Economist* and the *Far Eastern Economic Review* have been punished and their circulations restricted for publishing material critical of the Singapore government. And we may be stepping out of the region a little but one example of self-censorship might be Rupert Murdoch's decision to drop the BBC news from his satellite television service because, his critics say, he was fearful of offending the Chinese government.

But new technology is also helping overcome many restrictions. In *The Trouble with Tigers* we read of Burmese listening to the Burmese-language edition of BBC radio or the Voice of America to find out what is happening in the world and their own country without the distortions in Burma's official newspaper, *The New Light of Myanmar*. In Thailand the influence of the military-owned television stations has been diluted by new cable and satellite channels. Technological advances mean television and radio receivers are getting smaller. So, as Mallet writes "... it will be harder to enforce bans on satellite dishes when they are the size of a salad-plate than it is today, when their large frames loom conspicuously over people's houses."

The Internet is bringing new information to Asians despite the attempts of governments like Singapore to ban it. There, Internet users have to go through "proxy servers" that screen out sites black-listed by the Government. Local web pages are required to register with the Singapore Broadcasting Service. Restricted material, reports Mallet, includes pornography and statements to bring the government into hatred or contempt. But the Government controls can be thwarted by Singaporeans simply connecting through a service provider in neighbouring country. That ability to evade government restrictions so easily is a pointer to a further erosion of restrictions on the flow of information.

As mentioned earlier, Victor Mallet is optimistic about the region. The recovery that was only hinted at when this book was published now seems well under way with positive GDP growth in most countries. If that growth is to be sustained reforms to make the banking sector more transparent must continue and governments must be more responsive to their people. For those with an interest in the region, this book is a valuable read. For travellers thinking of going there, *The*

Trouble with Tigers will give them a new understanding of what is happening around them. For journalists reporting on the region, the book is a rich source.

— Nigel McCarthy

University of Queensland

Gotcha: Life in a Tabloid World

Catharine Lumby

Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999, 280pp.

Catharine Lumby describes this as “a hybrid book”, its research coming directly out of her newly completed PhD thesis as well as “scholarly works in the fields of media and cultural studies”. The result is a curious blend of readable prose with some original explorations of contemporary journalistic issues. *Gotcha* is an accessible book that is bound to be popular with students. Lumby says she wanted “to make some of the best scholarly work on this issue available to a broader public”. She has succeeded in this aim. She writes about icons such as Princess Diana, including life after her death, and the woman we love to hate, Pauline Hanson. Even though Hanson is yesterday’s news, she is still attracting fame in the publishing world. Lumby also deals with more complex issues such as John Hartley’s definition of the postmodern public sphere and the impact of popular culture and media on public and private life through the proliferation of new technology. Her style is uncomplicated even when discussing Michel Foucault’s analyses of power relations in contemporary democracies.

In *Gotcha*, Lumby sets out to prove that there has been an overwhelming democratisation of our media in past decades because of the increasing number of media voices and also in the way in which we discuss personal, social and political life. By turning our backs on the popular media and condemning it as “mindless trash or cynical commercialism”, we are ignoring an important contribution to the media debate, Lumby argues. We are also ignoring public taste. Speaking of taste, Lumby hasn’t lost her ability to shock, as evidenced in her earlier work, *Bad Girls*. In discussing sex and power, she states: “In

traditional feminist terms the phallus is the classic metaphor for male power, but it's important to remember that it's just that . . . If the phallus is a symbol, then the penis is its real-life corollary. And penises are notoriously unreliable. They shrink in cold water, droop after too much alcohol and, sometimes, just want a night or two to themselves. They're also unpredictable, unreasonable and faithless — though how their owners respond to these incitements and frustrations varies widely." Of course, this inflammatory argument, which could be seen as a blatant smack in the chops for the male population, is aired under the wider discussion of the public sphere increasingly becoming more private.

Lumby states that in the late-twentieth century, many of our most trusted institutions, not least the institution of the presidency of the United States, has been called into question. This is largely, she says, because we have expanded the categories of behavior we consider political or of public interest. The Monica Lewinsky affair and the focus on Clinton's penis was "bound up with allegations of perjury and harassment", she says. By the end of the day, broadsheets and tabloids alike were covering the more sordid claims, all under the loftier banner of morality and exploration of the central issue of whether he lied on oath. "The difference (between broadsheets and tabloid journalism) is often in the justification offered for publishing the story and the prose style in which it's written," writes Lumby. The name *Gotcha* came from Clinton's own response to allegations he had an affair. ". . . What the press has to decide is, are we going to engage in a game of 'Gotcha'? ." Lumby says it's the tabloid media that have forced private but political issues, such as domestic violence and sexual harassment, into the public sphere. Debate in the tabloid media canvasses important issues such as domestic violence and sexual harassment increasingly the subject of public inquiries, judicial proceedings and therapeutic discourse.

Lumby draws strength from John Hartley and some of the themes he explored in *Popular Reality*. Hartley defined the postmodern public sphere as one in which there is a reversal of many of the hierarchies we have held dear. The popular media don't encourage sustained argument, logical progressions or respect for expertise, Hartley says.

Instead, they are a rapidly changing montage of images and ideas and we live a society where the image has triumphed over the word and the vox pop has triumphed over the opinion of experts. Lumby agrees, pointing out that the vernacular in the tabloid media may not be in the language we recognise, say, from programs like ABC's *Lateline*, yet many of the subjects being debated are the same. She sees the tabloid media as an essentially neglected sector and points the finger at media and cultural studies teachers who, she says, opt for the more traditional approach of the small "I" liberalism perspective. That perspective she says, states that "good" journalism is the ABC-style of objective journalism told by authoritative voices reporting on big picture events like economic and parliamentary politics. Yet, she points out, we live in a world with a daily barrage of information from the media which "is not an environment that supports centralised, paternalistic model of news production where a small group of journalistic elites determines what information is in the public interest and what is merely trivial". It will be interesting to see how much focus on the tabloid media Lumby will give when she begins teaching the new media studies program at the University of Sydney next year.

Gotcha is not the only book to tackle the moralistic posturing found in the so-called "quality" press. Margaret Simons' book *Fit to Print*, also released this year, also tackles journalistic elites. Simons attacks the political reporters as writing in codes making it difficult for the reader who is left with their nose pressed against the window, "not quite able to see in". Apart from Diana, *Gotcha* devotes an entire chapter to celebrities as in the late-twentieth century, the distinction between fame and infamy has all but collapsed. Today more people than ever are famous. Lumby is not the first to make such an observation, but she also documents the growing interest in ordinary people who have survived extraordinary events such as Stuart Diver. "Reality is compelling for reasons which have nothing to do with why we watch action-packed movies. Live coverage of real events is fascinating because it offers us the illusion of participating in events as a community."

If there was a criticism about *Gotcha*, it would be that in proving her argument about the importance of the tabloid media in furthering

public debate, Lumby glosses over some of the ethical problems. She quotes investigative journalist Phillip Knightley as saying that, on many occasions, it is fair to pay for information. She cites the case in the US involving a family called the Lorys, whose 14-year-old daughter, Heather, was gang-raped by three boys. The father, Richard Lory shot and killed one of the accused boys, seriously injured his father and accidentally shot his own wife in the stomach. Richard Lory did not have adequate legal representation and their starring role in The Sally Jessy Raphael show, Lumby says, helped show the Lory's side of the story as well as give them some money for legal representation. Certainly, this is an admirable use of the chequebook payout, but all too often, that is not where the money ends up. However, you might justify it, there is something deeply offensive about such a payment. One women's magazine recently offered an extraordinary sum to Walter Mikac, whose wife and children were killed in the Port Arthur massacre so that they could have exclusive rights to cover his wedding. The wedding would be scripted, stage-managed and produced by a commercial media organisation with one motivation: increasing their own profits, a foregone conclusion in this world where we demand more and more of people's private lives. Nevertheless, *Gotcha* is an important Australian addition to media studies and Lumby reaffirms her role as one of the country's most original cultural commentators.

— Lindsay Simpson
University of Tasmania

Personal History

Katharine Graham

London: Phoenix Giant, 1998, ix + 641pp, \$24.95.

Morality or materialism? Public service or profit? These are the choices newspaper publishers face on a daily basis. Many commentators would lead us to believe that, almost inevitably, the publishers will choose profit. In Katharine Graham's account of her family's stewardship of the *Washington Post*, we learn that her father, Eugene Meyer, had a well-developed philosophy for running newspapers, one that placed telling the truth, as nearly as the truth

may be ascertained, as the priority. Meyer acknowledged that “in the pursuit of the truth, the newspaper shall be prepared to make sacrifice of its material fortunes, if such course be necessary for the public good”. He saw a newspaper as a public trust — a vehicle for serving the public in a democracy. This was not simply rhetoric, for it was nearly a decade after Meyer had bought the *Post* before he broke even financially. He was more concerned about moulding a significant newspaper in the long term than making a profit in the short term.

Graham provides fascinating insights into the life of a wealthy family in a city that has evolved into the world’s most important national capital and the relationships between the press and politicians in such an environment. The texture of this autobiographical account is enriched by Graham’s readiness to discuss what went wrong as much as what went right. This begins with her childhood. She does not dodge the difficulties she and her siblings faced, growing up with a mother who spent virtually no time mothering. Her father “lacked the gift of intimacy”, but his belief in her, she realised later, was “the single most sustaining thing in my life”. In all, the Meyer children were left to bring themselves up emotionally and intellectually because they saw so little of their parents, even if the parents were on the premises. Nothing difficult or personal was discussed within the family. The children were not aware of anti-Semitism. They grew up “in strange isolation both from our parents and from the outside world”. They were uncertain of their identity or whether they were going about things correctly. Uncertainty and insecurity were still evident in Katharine’s life when, through her own husband’s suicide, she became president and, later, publisher of what became one of the world’s great newspapers.

Eugene Meyer, a wealthy Jewish investor, bought the *Washington Post* at auction in 1933 for \$825,000. He made the purchase through an anonymous bidder (his lawyer (because five years earlier he had offered \$5 million for the paper. “None of us could have known then,” writes Graham, “what a transforming event this would be in all our lives.” The *Post* became the single most important topic of conversation within the family. Even when Katharine lived in Chicago as a college student and worked in San Francisco as a reporter on the afternoon News, her father and she “kept up a constant conversation through

the mail in which the *Post* often figured”. Katharine married a brilliant young lawyer, Phil Graham, who had been editor of the *Harvard Law Review*, the most prestigious collegiate job in the US. At the end of World War II, Phil Graham accepted Meyer’s offer to become his right-hand man at the *Post*. Phil Graham’s ascent to the status of publisher was hastened when Meyer decided to accept President Truman’s offer to become first president of the World Bank.

It cannot have been easy for Katharine Graham to write about her husband’s drinking problems, his descent into manic depression, his affair with the Australian journalist Robin Webb, his departure from the marriage (“I had to come to terms with this devastating reality”), her efforts at reconciliation, and his eventual suicide. Confronted with the reality of having to sell or run the *Post* herself, Graham knew she must continue. Her father had put too much into the paper for her to do anything else. She saw herself as a bridge to her children. She set out on a process of “nibbling around the edges, of trying to learn what made editorial and business function and how they fit together”. She found it a difficult and lonely process. “I made endless unnecessary mistakes and died over them. There was nothing to do but feel my way.”

Graham deals with a range of issues that will interest students of the press. Among them are:

- The *Post* followed a policy of non-endorsement of presidential candidates, even though personal support was conveyed (for example, Katharine Graham supported Johnson).
- In her relationship with editors of the editorial page, Graham adopted what she called the “no surprise rule”. She told editors they wanted to be “in on the takeoffs as well as the landings”. She did not want to pick up the *Post* and find a change of policy direction.
- Publishing the Pentagon Papers meant that the *Post* was now mentioned in the same breath as the *New York Times*; it prepared Graham and her staff for Watergate.
- Watergate: the lengths to which political pressure was brought to bear on Graham and her media enterprises; how much rested on Nixon’s own tapes.

- The 1975-76 printers' strike at the *Post*: a gripping account that matches any of the accounts of the end of Fleet Street.
- The source of the famous quote about journalism as the first rough draft of history: Phil Graham in a speech to *Newsweek* correspondents in London in 1963: "So let us today drudge on about our inescapably impossible task of providing every week a first rough draft of a history that will never be completed about a world we can never really understand . . ."

Personal History is a book with wide appeal. Some will scour it for the accounts of Watergate and the Pentagon Papers (the highly-detailed index facilitates such a search), others for the general historical aspects related to Washington newspapers, others for the interaction between politics and the press in postwar Washington, especially during the Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon eras. Even from a feminist perspective, there is much to ponder, and Katharine Graham is the first to wonder at her own readiness in earlier years to accept second best as a woman. Yet here is a woman thrust into the hot seat of business, the press and political intrigue, and, somehow, despite all her uncertainties, managing to achieve at the highest level. In all, this is a book to savour, to read from cover to cover.

— Rod Kirkpatrick
University of Queensland

Write to Publish

Vin Maskell & Gina Perry

Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1999, 200pp. \$19.95

Economic survival based on freelance writing is nearly as difficult as getting a novel published, yet in both cases there is no shortage of people seeking to turn their prose into cash. Based on the number of mainstream advertisements inviting would-be freelancers to enrol in writing courses one might think there is an enormous unfilled demand for unsolicited feature stories across Australia. The interest in writing for dollars is reflected in *Write to Publish*, a "how to" guide covering most of the fundamentals for the rookie freelancer. Written

by Victorian-based professional writing teachers Vin Maskell and Gina Perry, it represents an effective primer on feature writing for newspapers and magazines as well as corporate and community publications.

Without pretension the authors cover a lot of ground in 200 pages. Their book has chapters on professional writing, the marketplace, ideas, types of articles, research, interviewing, writing skills, editing, intros and endings and selling stories. *Write to Publish* also canvasses legal and ethical issues and includes exercises as well as testimonials from editors and successful freelancers. It could be argued the book tries to do too much and therefore does nothing really well, but that is the nature of such an introductory book. There's probably not enough depth to use it as a primary textbook for a feature writing course but it would prove useful as recommended reading.

The points are made that writing is a business and that perseverance and dedication are required for successful freelancing. However, *Write to Publish* does not go far enough in relating how difficult it can be for an inexperienced outsider to break into newspapers and magazines as a regular or occasional contributor. Even well-connected journalists of considerable talent and experience think twice about quitting their newspaper or magazine job to pursue an equivalent income as a freelancer. What chance, one might realistically ask, does an unpublished, untrained "freelancer" have to make a go of it? Possibly that is the point: pragmatic rookies keep their day job. Because they don't expect or need to make hundreds of dollars a week they risk less in "having a go". Even so, observation suggests many and probably most magazine and newspaper contributors have been trained and/or educated as journalists. The percentage of successful freelancers who have made it through do-it-yourself books would seem to be rather small. *Write to Publish* could have been more straightforward on this point. In that sense, the authors may be seen to have joined the brigade shouting "make money in your spare time as a freelance writer". It sounds simple, glamorous and lucrative.

To be fair, *Write to Publish* is not directed solely at those with ambition to earn money from freelance articles. It is a worthy guide for those seeking to write for non-profit newsletters, corporate-based

publications or a special-interest journal. For many, the thrill of a by-line and public communication is sufficient reward for writing. The authors perhaps could have placed more emphasis on the value of “local” news and the rebirth of the community newspaper following the death of Australia’s afternoon dailies. That’s an ideal place for the novice to enter journalism through the backdoor, and may even result in a job offer. If the adage is true that all news is local then many beginners would be better advised to front up to their suburban weekly than being crushed in the freelance rush to *Cleo* and *The Bulletin*.

So-called throwaway newspapers have been hailed in a *Sydney Morning Herald* feature (Deborah Cameron, “Reading all about it in the small print”, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 January 2000, p.10). It cites the two-masted, six-year-old *Balmain and Rozelle Village Voice* as the stars of Sydney’s freebie market with a combined circulation of 38,000. “You can’t be local if you are covering between 30 and 45 suburbs in one newspaper,” said editor Kylie Davis, a former reporter at *The Australian*. “People in Balmain have absolutely no affinity whatsoever with people in Concord or Mascot or even Newtown and Marrickville. Local really means local.”

It also means local editors are more likely to have time and space for home-grown apprentices. Like cadets, they can best learn by getting feedback and criticism from professionals who know ineffective self-editing, clumsy interviewing and working in isolation can kill the best story idea.

The Internet is the other logical launch point for the beginner. Electronic publishing is booming but this is overlooked by *Write to Publish*. These quibbles aside, the authors have succeeded in packaging a wealth of information in one small volume. For those who have to start some place, and that place cannot be a formal writing course or as a cadet journalist, then *Write to Publish* is a reasonable substitute.

— David Conley
University of Queensland

Notes for contributors

Australian Studies in Journalism welcomes manuscripts from any disciplinary perspective on topics associated with Australian journalism and news media. The range of areas of interest and relevance is vast. Examples of areas in which submissions are welcome include: studies of news media performance; analysis of government policy as it affects or relates to news media; legal studies of news media; cultural studies approaches to journalism; historical or biographical notes on former journalists (including creative writers or public figures whose background was in journalism); examinations of media coverage of institutions or aspects of Australian society; historical notes on particular newspapers or broadcast organisations; studies (especially comparative) of news media content; studies of interactions between news media and media consumers; studies of news flow and newsroom environments.

Manuscripts will be assessed by selected members of *ASJ*'s editorial advisory committee or by other specialists. The final decision on whether to accept a submitted paper will be the editor's. It will be assumed that no paper offered for publication is being simultaneously considered by another journal. If manuscripts are drawn from a thesis or another larger work, or if parallel papers have been published or presented, this should be made clear at the time of submission.

If a manuscript is accepted for publication, the author will be asked to submit a copy on disk, including any recommended corrections. The editor reserves the right to make minor editorial corrections and changes without reference to the author.

Referencing style: Sources should be indicated in the text by author-date method. For example,

According to Turner (1992) . .

Or

. . . while others disagree (Turner 1992). [note no comma]

If more than one author is cited:

. . . disagree (Turner 1988; Williams 1990).

A page number must be cited if any material is quoted. For example:

. . . Turner (1992, p.45) argues "it can be misleading to expect newspapers to fit exactly into a two-press model".

All works cited should be listed alphabetically as *References* at the conclusion of the manuscript. The style is:

Lacy, Stephen, Frederick Fico & Todd F. Simon (1991), "Fairness and balance in the prestige press", *Journalism Quarterly*, 68: 363-370.

Souter, Gavin (1981), *Company of Heralds*, Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Turner, Geoff (1992), "Information underload: recent trends in the *Courier-Mail* information news content", *Australian Studies in Journalism*, 1: 43-72.

Note that the titles of journals are italicised, while the article is in lower case.

Newspaper articles should be cited in the same way as for journals:

Porter, Henry (1992), "Royals and the rat pack", *Australian*, 11 June: p.11.

Newspaper titles: Titles of newspapers and broadcast programs should be italicised, but not the definite article (whether or not it is part of the masthead). Thus, the *Sydney Morning Herald*, the *Times*, *Four Corners*.

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